Chapter - II

EVOLUTION OF THE PRINTING PRESS IN ASSAM

Acc. No 347
Chapter - II

EVOLUTION OF THE PRINTING PRESS IN ASSAM

The invention of printing press has had a profound impact on modern society and civilization. Although the art of printing first began in China, the invention of the printing press is credited to the Germans.¹ In Chinese historiography, printing is considered as one of the Four Great Inventions of ancient China.² Woodblock printing on paper, whereby individual sheets were pressed against wooden blocks with the text and illustrations carved into them, was first recorded in China in the Tang Dynasty, although as a method for printing patterns on cloth the earliest surviving examples from China date to before 220 B.C.,³ and from Egypt to the sixth or seventh centuries A.D.⁴ Fenzhi, a Chinese writer, mentioned in his book, Yuan Xian San Ji, that the woodblock was used to print Buddhist scripture during the Zhenguan years (627-649 A.D.). But the

¹ Margerita Barns, The Indian Press, London, 1940, p. 5
³ ibid
oldest known surviving printed work is a woodblock printed Buddhist scripture in Chinese of Wu Zetian period (684-705 A.D.) discovered in Tubofan, Xinjiang province, China in 1906. It is now stored in a calligraphy museum in Tokyo Japan. The oldest surviving printed document, a copy of the Buddhist Diamond Sutra, is dated 848 AD. However, a recent excavation at a Korean pagoda may have unearthed an even earlier Buddhist text since it has been tentatively dated AD750-751.⁵

Johannes Gutenburg of Germany was the inventor of printing press in Europe. He set up his press at Mainz around 1439⁶ and in just over a decade, the classical age of printing began. The Gutenberg press was much more efficient than manual copying. A version of the Bible was printed at his press in 1453. After Gutenberg lost a lawsuit against his investor, Johann Fust, Fust put Gutenberg's employee, Peter Schoffer, in charge of the print shop. Thereupon, Gutenberg established a new one with the financial backing of another money lender. With Gutenberg's monopoly soon shattered, and the secrecy of the new technology compromised, printing spread through Germany and beyond, diffused first by emigrating German printers, but soon also by foreign apprentices. By the middle of the fifteenth century, the art of printing spread from Germany to Italy, France, England, and in fact, throughout Christianity. In rapid succession, printing presses were set up in middle and western Europe. Major towns, in particular, functioned as centers of diffusion (Koln 1466, Rome 1466, Venice 1469, Paris 1470, London 1476). In 1476, William Caxton established the first printing press in England.⁷ The first printing press in the New World was set up at Mexico City by the Spaniards in 1536.⁸ In 1481, barely thirty years after the publication of the Bible by

⁵ Shalagh Vainker, op.cit.
⁷ M. Barns, op.cit, p. 6
⁸ C. J. H. Hayes, Modern Europe to 1870, Delhi, 1982, p. 94
Gutenberg, the Netherlands featured printing shops in twenty one cities and towns, and in Italy and Germany around forty. According to one estimate, "by 1500, 220 printing presses were in operation throughout Western Europe and had produced 8 million books." Germany and Italy were considered the two main centres of printing in terms of quality and quantity. Sixteenth century Europe saw a steady development of this new art. Publishing became an honourable and lucrative business. The availability of books in abundance led to wider diffusion of knowledge among the people which in turn gave a fillip to renaissance.

The history of the printing press in India begins with the coming of the Europeans to India. The near simultaneous discovery of sea routes to the West (Christopher Columbus, 1492) and East (Vasco da Gama, 1498) and the subsequent establishment of trade links greatly facilitated the global spread of the Gutenberg style printing. Traders, colonists, but, perhaps most, missionaries exported printing presses to the new European overseas domains, setting up new printing presses and distributing printing material. In America, the first non-European printing press was set up in Mexico City. Soon after, the Jesuits started operating their first printing press on Asian soil (Goa, 1556). For a long time, however, movable type printing remained the business of Europeans, working from within the confines of their colonies. Ignorance and religious reasons were mainly responsible for the slow adoption of the printing press by indigenous people. Thus, printing remained prohibited in the Ottoman empire between 1483 and 1727, initially even on penalty of death. In India, it was reported that the Jesuits "presented a polyglot Bible to Emperor Akbar in 1580 but did not succeed in arousing much

curiosity"10 The English East India Company, brought a printer to Surat in 1675, but was not able to cast type in Indian scripts, so the venture failed.11 Among the Europeans, the Portuguese were the first to bring a printing press to India. They published their first book, a Catechism, by St. Francis Xavier, in 1557.12 However, the Press in India was largely an English institution. The English East India Company possessed several printing presses during the initial years of its operation in India,13 but, no newspaper were published by the Company as its officials apprehended that newspapers might expose their unethical and illegal practices in private trade. In fact, the Indian press was created by those who, for various reasons, were dissatisfied with the Company's administration and monopoly. The European Communities in India had to rely on newspapers that came from England. The first attempt to publish a newspapers in India was made by William Bolts, an ex-serviceman of the East India Company.14 Being censured for private trading by the Court of Directors, he sought to expose the malpractices of private trade through the paper. His efforts were, however, nipped in the bud as the Company forced him to depart.

The pioneer of journalism in India was James Augustus Hicky. In 1870 Hicky, with the previous approval of the Government, started a weekly paper called *Bengal Gazette* or *Calcutta General Advertizer*. The paper described itself as "A weekly political and commercial paper open to all Parties, but influenced by none".15 Hicky claimed freedom of press. He spared none, the Governor-General and his wife, the Chief Justice, Missionaries - all had to face his surrilous attack. Hicky's press was seized in 1782.

10. A. Maddison, *ibid*, p. 65
11. *ibid*
13. *ibid*, p. 44
14. *ibid*, p. 45
15. *ibid*, p. 46

(16)
The following years saw new publications like *The Calcutta Gazette* (1784), *The Bengal Journal* (1785), *The Oriental magazine or Calcutta Amusement* (1785), *The Calcutta Chronicle* (1786), *The Madras Courier* (1785), *Madras Gazette* (1795), *India Herald* (1795), *Hurkaru* (1793), *The Bombay Herald* (1789), *Bombay Courier* (1789), *Bombay Gazette* (1791) etc. These papers were generally of a non-political character and avoided clash with the authorities. They were published in English and hence primarily intended for Englishmen in India.

The Vernacular press in India was the outcome of the efforts of the famous Serampore missionaries William Ward, William Carey and Joshua Marshman. At the outset, the East India Company did not permit missionaries to preach Christianity in the Company's territories for fear of antagonising the people and thereby endangering its peaceful rule in India. The missionaries lobbied hard to gain the support of the East India Company and the British government. But they failed to include a clause in the Charter Art of 1793 in their favour due to the strong opposition from the Directors of the East India Company. Serampore was a Danish settlement and a bastion of the Baptist Mission. The Serampore Mission Press published the first Bengali monthly and weekly papers. The monthly, *Digdarsana* (Indicator of ways), appeared in April 1818, followed by the weekly *Samachar-Darpana* (Mirror of News) on 23 May, 1818.16 According to some writers, the weekly *Bengal Gazette* or the 'Bengal Gajeti' was the first vernacular newspaper in Bengal. However, not a single copy of *Bengal Gazette* is available and, therefore, the exact date of publication of the paper cannot be ascertained. Following this, there was a rapid growth of vernacular newspaper in Bengal. While some journals demanded reforms in Hindu society, some took up an orthodox stance opposing all

---

reforms. In December 1821, Raja Rammohun Roy started the Sambad-Kaumudi (Moon of Intelligence). The paper flashed political as well as social issues without any fear or favour. The paper strongly advocated religious and social reforms, most importantly, the abolition of sati. In March 1822, Bhabani Charan Bandopadhyay published Samachar Chandrika (Moonlight of News) as the organ of the orthodox Hindus. Rammohan also started the first weekly in Persian, Mirat-ul-Akbar (Mirror of News) in Calcutta in April, 1822.17

Subsequently, many newspapers in Indian language - Bengali, Hindi, Persian, Urdu, and a host of others besides English, sprang up in Calcutta. The first Hindi weekly, Odunt Martand, edited by Jugul Kishore Sukla appeared from Calcutta in 1826. The first missionary paper in Hindi, Lokamitra came out from Mirzapur in 1863. The Christian Missionaries contributed to the publication of newspapers in almost all the major indigenous languages of India. The first Telegu journal, 'Satyadoota', was published by the Christian Association of Bellary in 1836. The German missionaries established the first printing press in Mysore. They published the Kannada newspaper, Kannada Samachar from Bellary in 1812. The first Tamil paper - Tamil Magazine was published in 1831 by the Christian Religious Tract Society. In Malayalam too, the printing press was introduced by the Christian Missionaries, in the form of a newspaper, Vignyana Nikshepam published in 1840. The first Oriya paper Jnanaruna, published in 1849 from Cuttack was also a missionary endeavour. The Missionaries also established the first printing press at Ludhiana in 1809.18 The American Baptist Missionaries published the first newspaper in Assam-Orunodoi-in 1846.

It has already been mentioned that the East India Company had refused to allow

17. ibid, pp. 224-225.
18. Aurobindo Majumdar, Indian Press and Freedom Struggle, 1937-42, Calcutta, 1993, pp. 11-12
the Missionaries to settle or preach in the British territories. They did not want to disturb the traditional religious beliefs of the people, which they felt might endanger their safety in the newly acquired dominions in India. However, the Charter Act 1813 allowed the Missionaries free access to India. The Act not only gave official protection to the Christian Missionaries but also indirectly encouraged the Company's official, to patronize the missionary activities in their respective areas. The Missionaries of Serampore took the first opportunity to extend their missionary activities to the North-Eastern Frontiers of India. At the instance of David Scott, Agent to the Governor General, North-East Frontier, a branch of Serampore Mission was set up at Gauhati in 1829 under James Rae. Seven years later, William Robinson, the second missionary, joined him.\(^{19}\) In 1837-38, the Serampore Stations were amalgamated with the Baptist Missionary Society and it was decided to relinquish the Assam and Arakan fields to the American Baptist Mission. The Serampore Mission Station at Gauhati was eventually handed over to the American Baptist Mission.\(^ {20}\)

The American Baptist Mission entered Assam as a step towards entering China from the West. Assam's location as a highway to Tibet and Western China was of great strategic importance for the Missionaries. The American Baptist Mission of Burma had a long cherished dream of introducing Christianity among the Shans in the North-East, and through them to enter China by inland routes as her sea ports were then closed to foreigners. The American Baptist Mission in Burma received an official invitation from the Commissioner of Assam, Captain Francis Jenkins in 1835 to work among the Shans in Upper Assam. The dual interest in the Shans of Northern Burma and of entering

---

China made the invitation of Captain Jenkins impressive. In fact, Jenkins thought that the task of pacifying the Singpho and the Khamti tribes, could be done effectively by the spread of the Gospel. Meanwhile a British Officer and pioneer tea planter C.A. Bruce, who was working among the Khamti and the Singpho tribes at Sadiya had the false notion that these tribes were related to the Shans of Upper Burma and South China and accordingly briefed Captain Jenkins in this regard. Further Jenkins made a generous offer in connection with the opening of a station at Sadiya. He wrote-

"No intention of mine should be of course wanting to make the place (Sadiya) comfortable to any missionary and I will be willing to contribute my mite to their establishment. You may mention that I will subscribe 1,000 rupees, if a family is settled as a mission at Sadiya, and whenever they had a press at work for six months, I will be happy to double that sum, if I remain in charge of the Province."21

Under these circumstances, the missionaries at Maulmain in Burma set up a mission under Reverend Nathan Brown and Oliver T Cutter to commence the mission at Sadiya. Together with their families they came to Calcutta and started their journey up the Brahmaputra in three big country boats on November 20, 1835, reaching Gauhati on January 18, 1836 and Sadiya on March 23, 1836.22 Brown had made a special study on the Burmese language and Mr. Cutter had experience in printing. On the advice of Captain Jenkins, they brought along a printing press, hundred reams of paper and other relevant materials for printing. They were assured of an additional press which was handed over to them by Jenkins on their arrival. He even contributed rupees five hundred annually for its maintenance.23 However, Brown soon realized that the language

---

21 The Baptist Missionary Magazine, 1836; p. 21; also, A. M. William Gammell, History of the American Baptist Mission, Boston, 1850; p. 213.
22 Sangma, op. cit. pp. 28-29
23 Sunil Pawan Barua, Press in Assam, Guwahati, 1999, p. 18
of the tribes at Sadiya was different from those of the Burmese and other Shan countries. Their dreams of charting out a thoroughfare to the Celestial Empire was barricaded from Sadiya by insurmountable mountain ranges. But, Brown discovered a new thing at Sadiya - the Assamese language, which at first appearance looked like a dialect of Bengali. He soon realized this mistake and began loving and learning Assamese.²⁴

Brown's group of missionaries were soon joined by Rev. Miles Bronson, Rev. Jacob Thomas, Mr. and Mrs. Cyras Barkar, and Mrs. Rohda Bronson. Miles Bronson learned the Singpho and Khamti dialects and prepared to write books in them. However, the Khamti insurrection of 1839 compelled the missionaries to leave Sadiya and move to Jaipur, where they planned to work among the Noctes and Wanchos in the Namsang fields. Very soon they realised the futility of working on the Shan Mission and turned their attention towards the fertile plains of the Brahmaputra Valley. Besides, the baptism of Nidhiram Farwell, a youth on June 13, 1841 at Jaipur was largely instrumental in switching over the missionary activity from the hills to the Brahmaputra Valley. The American Baptist Missionaries selected Sibsagar "the most central and important place" - as their next station.²⁵ In 1843, the Printing Press establishment was brought from Jaipur to Sibsagar. The Press consisted of two printing machines with provision for printing in Assamese, Bengali, English and Shyans.

The Sibsagar Mission Press played a significant role in the socio-cultural history of Assam. In the beginning the Press was used for publishing Christian literature for the propagation of Christianity among the people of the valley. However, in January, 1846, 'Orunodoi' (Sunrise), the Assamese newspaper was published from the Sibsagar Mission Press under the joint efforts of Mr. Oliver T. Cutter and Dr. Nathan Brown. It is

²⁵. Sword, op.cit. pp. 67-68
interesting to speculate what must have inspired the missionaries to bring out a newspaper in Assam or to believe that a newspaper would be welcomed by the people of Assam. Perhaps the popularity of the Bengali newspapers like the *Samachar Darpan*, *Samachar Chandrika*, *Bangadut*, *Sangbad Prabhakar* and *Digdarshan*, among the educated Assamese intelligentsia that convinced them.\(^ {26}\) *Samachar Darpan*, 30 July, 1831, reported that-

"... The distinguished persons of the Province of Assam maintain contact with every affair in and around Bengal through the newspapers of this Province. In no district of Bengal are found so many subscribers to our newspapers as are found amongst the people of Assam. Moreover, while from about half the districts of Bengal no letter is sent and appears in newspapers, hardly a week passes without a letter being sent from Assam to us or to other newspaper editors of this Province."\(^ {27}\)

The respected citizens mentioned in the *Samachar Darpan* were none other than Jaduram Dekabarua (1801-1869), Haliram Dhekial Phukan (1802-1830), Haliram's brother Jagyaram Khargharia Phukan, Indibar Barua and many others. In the absence of newspapers in Assam these people used to subscribe to newspapers from Bengal. Thus, the missionaries had no doubt that at least the Assamese intelligentsia would be interested in newspapers. This probably encouraged them to bring out a newspaper in the local language. The *Orunodoi* was shaped on the model of the *Samachar Darpan*. Maheswar Neog, compiler and editor of the collected volume of the *Orunodoi* observed that, "in *Orunodoi*’s planning, *Samachar Darpan* was a model worth emulating."\(^ {28}\)

\(^{26}\) S.P. Barua, *op.cit.*, Guwahati, 1999, pp. 126-132

\(^{27}\) A. Guha., *Medieval and Early Colonial Assam - Society, Polity, Economy.*, New Delhi, 1991, p 207

\(^{28}\) G. P. Sarma, *150 years of Journalism in Assam*, Guwahati, 2007, p. 76
The main purpose of *Orunodoi* was to preach Christianity among the Assamese people through the medium of the local language. The paper contained articles entitled 'Dharamar Katha Batara' (Religious discussion), or 'Dharam Kathar Sambad' in almost every issue. These articles highlighted the merit, usefulness and superiority of Christianity. However, the contribution of *Orunodoi* to Assamese society was not limited to the preaching of Christianity. *Orunodoi* connected Assam with the rest of the world. *Orunodoi* covered almost all aspects of news in the modern sense of the term. The paper advertised itself as "The *Orunodoi*, a monthly paper, devoted to religion, science and general intelligence, Printed and published at Sibsagar Mission Press, by O. T. Cutter, for the American Baptist Mission in Assam. Price One Rupee per annum in advance, or One and a Half at the end of the year." The publishers of *Orunodoi* described the paper as an experiment which for them was equivalent to duty. *Orunodoi* published news items of educational, cultural, literary importance. Much space was devoted to subjects like social reform, education, welfare of the people, religion, health and hygiene etc. Contemporary news from both home and abroad were published under the headings of 'Anek Desar Sambad' (news from many countries), 'Engraj Desar Sambad' (news from England), 'Nana Desar Sambad' (news from different countries), and 'Asom Desar Sambad' (news from Assam). Although greater space of the paper was always given to the glorification of Christianity, it accommodated miscellaneous local and foreign news, articles on science, history, geography etc. The pages of *Orunodoi* contained beautiful illustrations. The illustrations were made of blocks, cut in wood, from the pictures of *The Illustrated London News*. The publishers of *Orunodoi* avoided confrontation with the

---

29. *Orunodoi*, January 1846 issue. Last page declaration of the *Orunodoi*.
government and hardly published anything offensive to the government. But the paper frequently published Government Orders.

The language of Orunodoi was straight forward and simple. During its initial years, the language was based on the first Assamese dictionary written by Jaduram Deka Barua (1801-1869). At a later period, Orunodoi adopted the style and spellings of Hem Chandra Barua. In 1881, Reverend William Ward, then editor of Orunodoi, had accordingly replaced the spelling of Orunodoi by 'Orunudoi'. During its lifetime Orunodoi was published under three names. The newspaper was known as 'Orunodoi - Sambadpatra' from January 1846 to December 1850. From January 1851 to December 1860 it was known as 'Orunodoi' and from January 1861 to December 1880 as 'Orunudoi'. The publishers of Orunodoi described it both as a newspaper and a magazine. The first issue of Orunodoi described it as a 'Paper'. However, the word 'Paper' was replaced by 'Magazine' from October 1850. The number of pages of Orunodoi varied from eight to sixteen. According to George Gillespie, the publication of the newspaper form of the Orunodoi ceased to see the light of the day from January 1855 while the magazine form continued. Although the paper was published since January 1846, it was only in its issue of August 1850 that the name of Dr. Nathan Brown as the editor of the paper was printed in it for the first time. The name of O. T. Cutter was printed upto February 1850 as the printer and publisher of Orunodoi. On the basis of available sources we can say that Dr. Nathan Brown was the editor of Orunodoi from 1846 to 1854. He was followed in succession by Appleton How Danforth (1855 to Jan

---

32. Orunodoi, April 1854 issue
34. Orunodoi, October 1850 issue.

(24)
1857), Sammuel M. Whiting (Feb. 1857 - Dec. 1860), William Ward (1861-1868), Edward W. Clark (Oct. 1873 - Sept. 1874), Mrs. S. R. Ward (1874-1879), A. K. Gurney) (1880). It cannot be ascertained who the editor of the paper was from January 1869 to September 1873, or whether the Orunodoi was in publication or not. However, W. W. Hunter, in the Statistical Account of Assam, prepared during the years between 1869 and 1873, refers to Orunodoi. From this reference we can infer that the paper was in circulation during that period.

The Orunodoi continued for 36 years. In 1882 the Sibsagar Mission Press was sold to the Assam Company. This may be the reason behind the disappearance of Orunodoi since 1882. The sale of the press to the Assam Company in 1882 and the discontinuation of the paper was, perhaps, part of the policy of the American Baptist Mission in Assam. The Missionaries had by then changed their direction towards the hills for the second time.

Besides holding high journalistic principles, Orunodoi had a significant impact on the Assamese society of the period. In the beginning of 1846, the total number of subscribers of Orunodoi was 579 (249 - Assamese). Although in 1854, the total number of subscribers came down to 440, it again rose to 700 in 1867-68. The circulation of the paper had increased to 700 in 1867-68 and the steady growth continued. Orunodoi

---

38 The Assam Company was formed in 1839 with a capital of half a million sterling in 10,000 shares of 50 each, of which 8,000 were allotted in great Britain and 2,000 in India. Although tea was the main object of its enterprise, it was decided to adopt the general designation of Assam Company rather than Assam Tea Company because it was felt that the Company might branch out to include other commodities like coal, oil and limestone. The Assam Company also owned a printing press. Cited in P. Goswami, Assam in the Nineteenth Century: Industrialization and Colonial Penetration, Delhi, 1999, p. 67.
39 Sir Edward Gait, Report of the Progress of Historical Research in Assam, 1897, p. 74
41 Orunodoi, June, 1854
42 Ibid
43 Gait, op.cit.
left such an impact on Assamese mind that any newspaper printed in the province was called *Orunodoi* by the villager.\(^{44}\)

The first Assamese newspaper published by an Assamese in Assam was *Asam Bilasini*. It was an Assamese monthly published by the Dharma Prakash Press, Majuli (Jorhat, Assam) in the year 1871. The paper was the outcome of the determined efforts of Sri Sri Dattadev Goswami, the *Satradhikar* of *Auniati Satra*. It required extreme courage to set up a printing press and bring out a newspaper from a river island like Majuli, considering the lack of communication facility at that time. Till that period, the Mission Press of the American Baptist Mission at Sibsagar was the only printing press in Assam. Goswami brought a printing machine to *Auniati Satra* from Calcutta and set up a printing press. The press was named *'Dharma Prakash Yantra'* meaning 'the machine to disseminate religion'. The meaning itself explains the purpose of the *Dharma Prakash Press*.\(^{46}\) Goswami had observed how the Christian Missionaries had used the press as an instrument to preach Christianity among the Assamese people. Through the columns of *Assam Bilasini* he made an effort to counter this by protecting the Vaishnava religion and culture from the inroads of the missionaries. The editor of the paper was Goswami himself while Sridhar Barua Ojha was the publisher. The paper was of eight pages. Each page was divided into three columns. The size of the paper was 11"x8". The last page of the paper contained a declaration in Assamese - "The *Assam-Bilasini Patrika* is printed every mounth at the *Auniati Dharma Prakash Press*, situated at Majuli, Assam in Jorhat. The yearly subscription rate in advance is one rupee."\(^{46}\) Noted literateur and critic, Tirthanath Sarma has said : "The most invaluable contribution of the *Auniati Satra* was the creation of this means of knowledge

---

\(^{44}\) *Ibid*


\(^{46}\) G. P. Sarma, *op.cit*, p. 79

(26)
dissemination through the Fourth Estate."\textsuperscript{47} The \textit{Assam Bilasini} logo had two slokas inscribed on it in Sanskrit (printed in the block printing format of that time). The sloka in the inner circle read - "Just as the Almighty wishes, may the positive elements inherent in the \textit{Assam Bilasini} spread its enlightenment among the masses like the refreshing lights of autumn moon."\textsuperscript{48} The sloka in the outer circle read - "In order to quench the thirst for knowledge and to broadcast analytical news of the country for the discerning readers, the \textit{Assam Bilasini} has been published by Dattadev Goswami himself."\textsuperscript{49} The language of the paper was simple, but not much attention was paid to spelling. The paper highlighted local problems and grievances. There was also a separate section of the 'Letters to the Editor' in the paper.\textsuperscript{50} The \textit{Assam Bilasini} continued for twelve years and was closed down in 1883 owing to the shifting of the \textit{Satra} to some other place.\textsuperscript{51} The \textit{Assam Bilasini} did not generate much profit nor was it published for the generation of profit. The paper was published with a noble cause of preserving Vaishnava culture and religion.

The \textit{Dharma Prakash} Press was a wonderful example of Assamese enterprise. Even during the lifetime of \textit{Assam Bilasini}, another monthly journal in Assamese, \textit{Assam Dipak}, appeared from the \textit{Dharma Prakash} Press in 1876.\textsuperscript{52} The paper lasted for only one year. \textit{Dharma Prakash} Press published another Assamese monthly, \textit{Asam Tara}, in 1888. \textit{Asam Tara} published articles having of religious, historical and literary importance. The paper lasted for two years. It ceased publication from September 1890, owing to the proprietor having gone on a pilgrimage.\textsuperscript{53} \textit{Assam Mihir}, an Anglo-Bengali

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{47} T. Sarma, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 451
\bibitem{48} G. P. Sarma, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 78
\bibitem{49} \textit{ibid}
\bibitem{50} \textit{ibid}, p. 82
\bibitem{51} Gait, \textit{op.cit.}
\bibitem{52} \textit{ibid}
\bibitem{53} \textit{ibid}
\end{thebibliography}
weekly, edited by Jadunath Chakravarty, appeared from the Chidananda Press of Gauhati in 1872. The paper was first published in Bengali and subsequently in both Bengali and English. Significantly, this was the first weekly newspaper in Assam and the first Bengali newspaper published from the Brahmaputra Valley. The paper was owned by Chidananda Choudhury, an Assamese educated person from Barpeta. He was the owner of the Sanchali Tea Estate near Gauhati. It is interesting that the owner of the paper, being an Assamese, preferred to publish a Bengali paper instead of an Assamese one. In fact, prior to the publication of *Orunodoi*, as has already been mentioned, the newspapers from Bengal were widely read in Assam. The Bengal Press had contributed towards the formation of public opinion in Assam to a great extent. Moreover, till 1874, Assam was governed as a part of Bengal Presidency and Bengali was the official language of Assam till 1873. Chidananda Choudhury, who had been to Calcutta for higher education was influenced by the Brahmo Movement, which was at its peak during that period in Bengal. The editor of the paper, Jadunath Chakravarty was also an ardent follower of Keshab Ch. Sen. It is likely that the paper was taken up to popularise the Brahmo Movement in Assam. Initially, the circulation of the paper was confined to the followers of the Brahmo faith only. However the paper had short life. *Asam Mihir* lasted only for a year and ceased to appear from 1873 for want of sufficient support.

*Goalpara Hitasadhini*, another Bengali weekly, was published in 1876 by the *Hitasadhini Sabha* of Goalpara. This paper also failed for want of support. The paper survived for only two years. A number of Bengali papers appeared from the Surma

---

54. *ibid*; also J. N. Bhuyan *Uwali jioa Nathir Para*, Nagaon, 1991, p. 83
57. Gait, *op.cit.*
58. *Ibid*
Valley. The first Bengali paper of the Valley was 'Srihatta Prakash', published from Calcutta in 1875. Until that period, there was no printing press in the Valley. The paper was edited by Pyaricharan Das. The first paper to be published from the Valley was the fortnightly, later weekly, 'Paridarsak', in 1880. The paper was founded and edited by the famous nationalist leader, Bipinchandra Pal. The name of Radhanath Choudhury is also associated with the paper. In 1893, Nagendra Chandra Dutta edited and published the weekly 'Srihattabashi' which was subsequently amalgamated with 'Paridarsak' under the new name 'Paridarsak - O - Srihattabashi', and continued till 1890. In 1900, 'Paridarsak' was again revived. These papers were moderate in tone and mostly published local news with occasional cuttings from Calcutta newspapers. In 1883 appeared 'Silchar' from Cachar. The paper was edited by Bidhu Bhushan Roy and continued till 1902. The paper highlighted important social and political problems of the day and played a commendable role in the formation of public opinion in the Valley.

The later half of the 19th Century saw the appearance of several short-lived newspapers and magazines. Although we cannot ascertain with confidence the role of some of these papers in the Assamese society of that period, we cannot ignore their historical significance either. Assam Darpana, a monthly journal in Assamese, was started in 1874 by Lakshmi Kanta Barkakoty. The paper was printed in Calcutta and published from Biswanath, Tezpur. The paper lasted for a brief period. In the year 1875-76, two papers, one dealing with topics related to science and literature and other of a religious nature, published from Nowgong. Both the papers were printed at Calcutta. The religious paper was most probably the monthly religious treatise edited by the Dihingia Gosain of Nowgong. The circulation of the paper was limited to his

60. S. P. Barua, op. cit. P. 49
61. Gait, op. cit.
62. J. N. Bhuyan, op. cit., p. 84
own disciplines. The paper 'devoted exclusively to scientific and literary subjects' was brought out by Padmahash Goswami. Gyanodoi calls for special attention because, quite surprisingly, the paper, somehow, failed to get its rightful place in the history of journalism till date. The paper has, however, been mentioned in the Government Reports and Records of the Province of Assam for the year 1874-75 and 1875-76. According to the report of T. B. Mitchell, the then Deputy Commissioner of Nagaon, "The Gyanodoi, a vernacular publication of about the size of two sheets of letter paper professing to treat of science and literature is published at Calcutta by a native of this District." Subsequently, a controversy arose regarding the publication of the paper because Padmahash Goswami, the editor of the paper, being unaware of Government rules had not taken the requisite permission. A. N. Philips, who succeeded Mitchell wrote to the Inspector of Schools defending Padmahash vide his letter No. 195 dated Nowgong, June 9, 1876:

"Sir,

With reference to your letter No. 701 dated 2nd inst., I have the honour to inform you that the Manager of the 'Gyanodoi' periodical, Padma Hans Goswami and the Pandit of the Zilla School are one and the same person. He has, never it seems, obtained the Chief Commissioner's sanction to his conducting this periodical, and he has been informed that he was wrong in undertaking the management of it without such sanction. He says the omission was due to ignorance on his part and he now solicits the Chief Commr's sanction. As the paper is a very harmless one, and devoted exclusively to scientific and literary subjects, I would beg to recommend his application."

63 Gait, op. cit.
64 J. N. Bhuyan, op. cit., p. 86
65 Report on the Administration of the Province of Assam for the year 1874-75 and 1875-76
66 J. N. Bhuyan, op. cit. pp. 85-86
Gyanodoi was also mentioned by Bholanath Das in his poem Assam Bandhu, although he does not give a good impression about the paper.67 A newspaper called Digvijay was published from Dibrugarh by Dharmakanta Barua of Lakhimpur during the same period. The paper discussed various social problems, particularly those concerning the working class. The Editor of the paper was probably inspired by the Bengali Paper, Bharat Sramajeeti, of Sashipada Banerjee of Calcutta.68

Another vernacular monthly magazine, Chandrodaya was issued from the Chidananda Press, Gauhati in 1876. It also lasted for only a brief period.69 In 1877, a paper called Dibrugarh Telegraph appeared from the Exchange Lithographic press of Lakhimpur. Not much is known about the paper.70 Lorar Bandhu, a children's magazine appeared from Calcutta in 1888. It was edited by Karunabhiram Barua. But Lorar Bandhu ceased publication after publishing only two issues.71

Though short-lived, papers like Assam News (1882), Assam Bandhu (1885), Mau (1886) - played a significant role in presenting new ideas and information to the Assamese. Assam News was the first Anglo-Assamese weekly published from Gauhati in 1882. The paper was printed at the Assam News Press of 'Barua-Phukan Brothers' of Manik Chandra Barua and Anandaram Phukan (son of Anandaram Dhekial Phukan). leading businessmen and social workers of the time. Hem Chandra Barua, doyen of Modern Assamese language, was the editor of the paper and Raibahadur Abhoyasankar Guha was the assistant editor.72 The most important contribution of Assam News was the creation of the modern form of Assamese language. Lakshminath Bezbaruah had

68. Tilottoma Misra, Swarnalata, Guwahati 1997, p. 199
69. Gait, op.cit.
70. S. P. Barua, op.cit. p. 110
71. ibid. p. 101
72. Benudhar Sarma, op.cit.
confessed that he learnt the style of writing Assamese from Assam News. The paper strongly criticized the policies of the government. The paper stopped publication from July 1885 owing to difficulties in matters related to the appointment of editors. Assam News had almost nine hundred subscribers. Within three years, the paper succeeded in not only creating public opinion on problems of common interest but also in raising the standard of journalism in Assam. In his paper Bengalee, Surendranath Banerjee expressed sorrow on the death of Assam News. In January 1885 appeared Assam Bandhu, an Assamese monthly, under the editorship of Rabindranath Gunaviram Barua. The paper published articles related to arts, science and literature, and the editor made it very clear that the paper would be free from political and communal bias. The editor was liberal in terms of spellings. The paper published only 16 issues, and had to stop from April 1886 due to want of support. Barua had started a series of valuable articles, entitled Assam-Past and Present, but with the death of the paper, the series remained incomplete. Lakshminath Bezbaruah observed that -

"... the two giants of Assamese language, Assam News and Assam Bandhu did the spade work for creation of Assamese prose and poetry in modern form, i.e., they tilled the land for that ... Assam Bandhu and Assam News showed for the first time that sweet, simple, tasty but high level prose writing could entertain all Assamese."  

In December 1886, Bolinarayan Bora published the monthly Mau or The Bee under the editorship of his brother Harnarayan Bora. Bolinarayan was the first Assamese engineer with a degree from U. K. Although Harnarayan was the editor of

73. Lakshminath Bezbaruah, Mor Jivan Soworon, Jorhat, 1966, pp. 65-66
74. Gait, op.cit.
76. 'Assam Bandhu', Assam Bandhu, Vol. 1, 1885, I issue, Magh, Saka 1806.
77. Gait, op.cit.
78. Lakshminath Bezbaruah, op.cit.
the paper it reflected more prominently the views of Bolinarayan, who had been planning to bring out a publication for quite some time. The inclusion of an English equivalent (Mau or The Bee) was an unprecedented example, till then, among the papers of Assam. Mau published a large number of thought-provoking articles like Asomiya aru Bangali (Assamese and Bengali), Chah Bagichar Kooli (Tea Garden Labour), Uchcha Sikshya (Higher education), etc. The paper openly discouraged the craze of the Assamese youths for getting into white collared jobs and urged them to take up industrial professions and become more responsible socially. Unfortunately, the critical writings of Mau were far ahead of times and, therefore, failed to get an appreciative readership. In fact, it annoyed the Assamese middle class, in general, and students in Calcutta, in particular. Led by Lakshminath Bezbaruah a majority of Assamese students studying in Calcutta opposed the publication of Mau. The paper could not survive in the face of such strong opposition. Mau discontinued after its fourth issue in March 1887.80 The Englishman, edited by J. W. Furrell, had showered acolades on Mau. Maheswar Neog observes: "The endeavour of Mau to create a new taste and the ill efforts of Bezbarua and the rest to crush the paper is mysterious."81 However at a later stage Bezbarua admitted, "Our puerility did not allow us to understand at that time what loss we had caused to our nation by killing a good paper."82

The Assamese students receiving higher education in Calcutta in the late 19th Century were influenced by the intellectual consciousness that took place in Bengal under the impact of Renaissance. They witnessed the modernization of Bengali language and literature and were inspired to bring about a renaissance in Assamese literature. in 1872 they organised the 'Asamiya Chhatrar Sahitya Sabha' (Assamese Students Literary Society) in Calcutta. The society failed for lack of patronage but it paved the

80. Lakshminath Bezbaruah, op.cit. pp. 118-119
82. G. P. Sarma, op.cit., p. 131

(33)
way for the 'Asomiya Bhasar Unnati Sadhini Sabha' or 'Society for the Development of Assamese language' which was set up in Calcutta on 25 August 1888. Among the students who organised this society were Lakshminath Bezbaruah, Chandra Kumar Agarwala, Hemchandra Goswami, Kanaklal Barua, Ramakanta Barkakoti, Benudhar Rajkhowa, Padmanath Gohain Barua, Ananda Chandra Agarwala, Durga Prasad Majindar Barua, Satyanath Bora, Lambodar Bora, Sonaram Choudhury and Rajanikanta Bardoloi. Soon the organisers realized the need of a mouthpiece of the society and accordingly 'Jonaki' - a new Assamese monthly was started on 9 February 1889 from Calcutta. Chandra Kumar Agarwala was the founder editor and publisher of the paper. He made literary contributions compulsory for every member of the Society failing which a fine of Rs.15/- was imposed on them as punishment. The magazine was edited in succession by Hem Chandra Goswami, Lakshminath Bezbaruah, Sonaram Choudhury, and Minadhar Hazarika.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Sakabda</th>
<th>Vol</th>
<th>Editor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st Year</td>
<td>1810-1811</td>
<td>1889 AD</td>
<td>11 Vols.</td>
<td>C.K. Agarwalla</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd Year</td>
<td>1811-1812</td>
<td>1890 AD</td>
<td>12 Vols.</td>
<td>Hem Ch. Goswami</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd Year</td>
<td>1812-1813</td>
<td>1891 AD</td>
<td>10 Vols.</td>
<td>Lakshminath Bezbaruah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th Year</td>
<td>1813-1814</td>
<td>1892 AD</td>
<td>11 Vols.</td>
<td>Lakshminath Bezbaruah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th Year</td>
<td>1816-1817</td>
<td>1895 AD</td>
<td>7 Vols.</td>
<td>Sonaram Choudhuri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6th Year</td>
<td>1817-1818</td>
<td>1896 AD</td>
<td>11 Vols.</td>
<td>Minadhar Hazarika</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7th Year</td>
<td>1818-1819</td>
<td>1897 AD</td>
<td>6 Vols.</td>
<td>Minadhar Hazarika</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8th Year</td>
<td>1819-1820</td>
<td>1898 AD</td>
<td>1 Vol.</td>
<td>Minadhar Hazarika</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chart showing the year of publication, volume numbers, and names of editors of Jonaki.

---

83. C. P. Saikia, *op. cit.*, p. 119
84. *ibid.* p. 120
85. *ibid.* p. 121
The objective of the paper was to bring a literary awakening among the Assamese people. It dealt with a variety of topics on science, history, sociology, economics and literature. The most important contribution of Jonaki was the inauguration of a new era - the Jonaki Age in Assamese literature. The Age of Romanticism in Assamese poetry began with Jonaki. The editors of Jonaki were moderate in tone and avoided political discussions. Between 1889 and 1898, Jonaki published 69 issues from Calcutta. A new edition of Jonaki reappeared from Gauhati in 1901.87

During the middle of 1891, a group of Assamese students living at Pratap Chandra Chatterjee Lane at Calcutta withdrew their support from Jonaki and Asomiya Bhasar Unnati Sadhini Sabha. This break-away group formed a new organisation, Asamiya Sahitya Sabha or Assamese Literary Club, and published a new monthly magazine called Bijuli as their mouthpiece.88 Printed at the Kripasindhu Press, Balram Street Calcutta, Bijuli was possible due to the efforts of persons like Benudhar Rajkhowa, Krishna Prasad Dowerah, and Padmanath Gohain Barua. The magazine was first jointly edited by Krishna Prasad Dowerah and Nilakanta Barua. Padmanath Gohain Barua edited the magazine from its second year. Bijuli presented a broad discussion on a variety of social and political problems. It devoted itself towards the greater interest of the Assamese Community and all round development of Assam. Raibahadur Gunaviram Barua, editor, Assam Bandhu, also regularly contributed articles to Bijuli. Among his important writings were Asomar Unnati (Development of Assam), Assam Yatra (Journey

87. *ibid.* pp. 120-121
to Assam), *Kathin Sabdar Rahasya Vyakhya* (An explanation to the puzzle of difficult words) etc. Besides the editorial works, Gohain Barua contributed the largest number of articles and poems to the magazine. He wrote *Asamiya Rajahar Natun Niyam* (The new revenue regulation of Assam), *Asamiya Deka Samaj* (Society of the Assamese youth) *Asamiya Batori Kakat* (Assamese Newspaper) *Ahomor Din* (Days of the Ahom) etc. His *Bhanumati*, the first novel in Assamese literature appeared as a serial from the first issue of the magazine. Benudhar Rajkhowa wrote *Asamiya Bhasa Kenekoi Beleg Bhasa* (How Assamese is a different language), *Unnati aru Asom* (Development and Assam). Other important contributors of *Bijuli* were Lambodar Bora, Ananda Chandra Agarwala, Lakshmikanta Gogoi, etc. As a literary magazine *Bijuli* had significant contributions. The article *Asomiya Bhasa Kenekoi Beleg Bhasa* highlighted the independent character of Assamese language. The article pointed out the basic differences between Assamese and Bengali language. Besides, *Bijuli* had articles on history, science, health, biographies of greatmen, book reviews etc. The Calcutta edition of *Bijuli* survived for only three years. *Bijuli* reappeared from Shillong in 1902 for a brief period.89

In 1894, *Assam*, the third weekly newspaper appeared from Gauhati. A retired sub-inspector in the Education Department, Kaliram Barua started this bi-lingual paper on the model of *Assam News*. Manik Chandra Barua assisted Kaliram Barua in the publication of the paper. While Manik Ch. Barua edited the English section of the paper, Kaliram Barua, with the assistance of Satyanath Bora, edited the Assamese Section.90

The paper presented fearless criticisms on issues of both national and local interest. The paper had a vision of a conscious Assamese society. *Assam* played an important

89. C. P. Saikia, *op.cit.*, pp. 217-223
90. Benudhar Sarma, *op.cit.*
role in the establishment of Cotton College - the first institution of higher education in the province. Manik Ch. Baruah published a number of articles and comments in favour of the foundation of Cotton College in the paper. These discussions gradually involved almost all the leading citizens of Assam. Besides, the paper published poems, essays, articles on Hinduism, *Desh Bideshar Batori* (Inland and foreign news) etc. After continuing publication for seven years, the paper closed down in 1901.91

The first English weekly of Assam, *The Times of Assam*, appeared from Dibrugarh on 5 January 1895. The paper was published and edited by Radhanath Changkakoty who had to face many difficulties in bringing out the weekly. With limited resources in hand, he began his project with a wooden press, brought from Calcutta, under a thatch roof in Dibrugarh. He received wide encouragement and support from Dr. John Berry White, then Civil Surgeon of Dibrugarh. Dr. White had even sent a printing press from England but it failed to reach Changkakoty. Soon his wooden press was also gutted and he had to replace it by a new iron printing press. Changkakoty did not surrender to circumstances. In this regard he received help from various quarters. The Barpeta *Kirtan Ghar*, the Auniati *Satradhikar* - Sri Sri Duttadev Goswami (Publisher of *Assam Bilasini*), Maheswar Goswami and Kalicharan Sen of Gauhati extended donations to him. With the fund thus created, he was ready to publish the paper. Under these circumstances, *Times of Assam* saw the light of the day.92 The paper was printed at Radha Nath Press, later named as Times of Assam Press. The editor of the Paper was Radhanath Changkakoty and Basambad Mitra was the assistant editor.

From the very beginning, *The Times of Assam* acted as a mouthpiece of the European tea planters and British officials. In fact, the name *Times of Assam* was

91. *ibid*
92. C. P. Saikia, ed. *Radhanath Changkakoty*, Guwahati, 1971, pp. 4-12

(37)
given to the paper by Mr. F. C. Moran, Manager of Khanikor Tea Estate. Sir William Ward, the Chief Commissioner of Assam, had appointed the Times of Assam Press as the official press of the Government. The Paper received advertisements from the tea-gardens, commercial companies of Calcutta and the Government. All the Deputy Commissioner and Sub-Divisional Officers of the Brahmaputra valley subscribed the paper.93 With so much support, the paper had a fairly large circulation. Inspite of its pro-British character, The Times of Assam raised important issues like the poverty and degraded condition of the Assamese ryots and urged remedial measures for them. The Paper also discussed the issue of the Local Boards in Assam, and insisted that they be composed of men with educational qualifications and not by Mouzadars who had hardly any formal education.94

In 1898, another English Weekly The Eastern Herald appeared from Dibrugarh. The Paper described itself as a paper of 'Politics, Morals and Society'. It was printed and published by Warn. S. Taylor at Albino Press on behalf of Durga Dutta Agarwala, a Marwari business and proprietor of the paper. The paper was edited by Umesh Ch. Banerjee, of Dibrugarh. Apart from a regular editorial column which commented on important public issues, the paper published provincial and local news, letters to the editor, important news cuttings from papers like Pioneer etc. The paper also criticised the various forms of social evils in the Indian society particularly among the Hindus. The Eastern Herald ceased publication from 1901.95 The end of the century saw the appearance of Asam Bonti from Tezpur in 1900 and Srihatta Darpan and Weekly Chronicle from the Surma Valley in the same year.

93. S. P. Barua, op. cit. p. 112
94. ibid. p. 114
95. ibid. pp. 117-118.
A survey of the growth and development of the Press in Assam in the later half of the nineteenth century reveals that compared to the other parts of the country, the growth and development of newspapers in Assam was not only late but also slow. Chandra Kumar Agarwala, the founder editor of Jonaki in the first editorial described the position of newspapers in Assam as 'a drop of water on an arum leaf'. During the second half of the nineteenth century not less than twenty-five newspapers and magazines appeared in Assam and most of them were short-lived. Only Orunodoi continued its publication for more than three decades. High production costs and lack of literary contributions from the educated section of the society were some handicaps that Assamese press had to face at that stage. Moreover, they faced competition, to some extent, from papers from Bengal.

The Press in Assam during this period deliberately avoided political issues and concentrated on more general issues. 'A subject nation has no politics', stated a leading article in Jonaki. The tone of the average newspaper was moderate and continued as such till the end of the century. In spite of its limitations, the press in Assam raised the standard of public understanding and made a powerful impact on the transition of Assamese society from the medieval to modern era.