Since the second half of the 16th century Jesuit missionaries arrived in India from Europe to propagate Christianity among the Indian people. The battle of Plassey in 1757 heralded the establishment of British empire in India and a foreign Christian power now started to guide the destiny of the people of the Indian sub-continent. It is true that the Company's rule in India at the initial stage did not encourage the Christian missionaries to disturb the time honoured religious beliefs of the people. Whatever might have been the official policy of the East India Company, unofficially missionaries did not fail to receive patronage from the Company's officials. In these days Calcutta was the centre of the Company's administration and soon a Christian mission at Srirampore near Calcutta and outside the territory of East India Company, started to publish books in Bengali literature and also published two papers *Digdorsan* and *Samshar Darpan*. Both the papers were to demonstrate the superiority of Christianity at the cost of religious beliefs of the local people. At this critical hour, two groups of Hindu reformers came forward, particularly in Bengal to meet the challenge from Christian missions. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, initiated a reform programme to modify the existing beliefs in the Hindu society and appealed to the countrymen to adjust themselves to the changing patterns of modern life. With a view to providing
a definite shape to his movement, he started publication of a Bengali paper entitled the Sambad Koumodi in 1881 and another paper in Urdu, Mirat-Ul-Akbar in 1882. Atmiya Sabha, a religious association of the reformed group was born to strengthen the socio-religious movement of the enlightened Hindu society. All this sowed the seeds of the Brahmo Samaj in Bengal. However, Raja Ram Mohan Roy in his new movement faced stiff resistance from an influential section of the Hindu society. The conservative group led by Chobani Charan Bondopaddhya stood against any kind of reforms and wanted to preserve the existing Hindu beliefs. This conservative group established the Dharma Sabha and in 1882 appeared Samachar Chandika, as the spokesman of this new religious association.

At a later period, numerous indigenous journals and newspapers reflecting both liberal and conservative views sought to safeguard the interest of Hindu ideals against the inroads of foreign missionary propaganda.

III,II Within three decades of the publication of newspapers in the Bengali language, Arunoday appeared as the first paper through the Assamese medium. Arunoday covered almost all the important topics from literature to science. However, as the mouthpiece of the American Baptist Mission, it also discharged its primary duty of propagation of Christianity among the local people. This caused concern among the leading persons of the indigenous people and provoked them to make determined efforts to preserve the old practices against strange new religious
and cultural inroads. They utilised the medium of the evolving language press to protect religion. In other words the press enjoyed the patronage of local religious circles.

In the 16th century Sri Sri Sankardev (1449-1569), the Vaishnava saint of Assam introduced the Bhakti cult in the form of Khasaran Name Dharma. It insisted on the worship of one God and salvation through Name dharma. The religious teachings of Sri Sankardev were interpreted by his chief disciples in different places in different forms. Inspite of these differences of opinion, even today, Majuli, the largest river island in the world is regarded as the centre of Vaishnava culture in Assam. The four main satras in Majuli in the middle of the river Brahmaputra represented the Brahmassastra sect of Vaishnava belief and enjoyed royal patronage during the time of the Ahom rule. Amjati Satra, one of the important centres of the Brahmassastra sect in Majuli went a step further and took the cause of journalism in the interest of Vaishnava religion and culture. Sri Sri Dutta deva, the Satradhikar (Head of Amjati Satra) observed with concern the spread of Christianity through the medium of the Baptist Mission Press of Sibsagar. With his foresight, he could realise the need for a like printing press of his own at Majuli. Accordingly printing machineries were brought from Calcutta and in 1861 Dharma Prakash Press was established at Majuli to publish religious works in the local language. After the completion of ten years of the establishment of the Dharma Prakash press and twentyfive years of the birth of Arupoday in 1871, Assam
Bilashini, the second monthly paper in Assamese language came to be published from Majuli under the patronage of the Satradhikar of Ammjeti Satra. In fact like Samachar Chandika of Bengal, Assam Bilashini also stood for to counter act the work of the American Baptist Mission for the spread of Christianity in Assam. The news on the contemporary Indian rulers and nobles very often adorned the columns of Bilashini and at the same time the paper also paid tribute to the persons enjoying status in the society. Col. Kittinga, the first Chief Commissioner of Assam paid a visit to Ammjeti Satra and Nohammad Ali, a government officer had narrated the story in the paper in well written language. However, the paper also served as the mouthpiece to place the local grievances of the people before the government.² The standard of Bilashini was not high both from the point of printing and content. Moreover, the paper could not follow a standard language for lack of a recognised Assamese dictionary at the time. But it did not affect the overall role of the paper in the history of Assamese journalism. Even today Majuli, the river island of Brahmaputra is the victim of natural calamities and has to face an acute communication problem particularly in the time of floods. The publication of a newspaper in those days was not a business proposition as such, it was rather a noble mission without any thought of profit. So the spirit lying behind this ideal encouraged the owner to continue its publication for long twelve years, ignoring the facts about its profit or loss. In 1883 the paper ceased its publication owing to the shifting of the Ammjeti Satra to a new site.³ Assam Bilashini was the
second paper published in the list of the Assamese language papers. However, it was the first Assamese newspaper published with full indigenous effort and initiative under religious patronage in the State. Thus overcoming the hesitation at the initial stage Assam Bilaabini established a healthy precedent and laid a milestone in the field of the Assamese press.

Sri Minanda Chandra Goswami, the astrodhikar of Dihingia Satra at Baha in Newgong district, published a monthly treatise of religious subjects which was circulated among his followers. The name of the paper was Chandroday and it was edited by Jibeswar Baruah of North Guwahati and printed at Chidananda press of Guwahati. Perhaps in the style of Aryoday the paper was called as Chandroday. It was published in 1875 and hardly lasted for one year. In the tenth issue of the paper in 1876 appeared an article, with the title of "Chandroday patrihar Biday Grahan" (Farewell of Chandroday). The paper with its annual subscriptions of Rupees one and anu four appointed agents in places like Sibsagar, Goalpara, Dibrugarh, North Guwahati and Guwahati. The tenth and the last issue of the paper, contained seven pages only and dealt with materials like - the story of Nala, essential qualities of a teacher, discussion on Varnaavasa, medicine to avoid opium etc. At the close of the publication of Assam Bilaabini, Assamti Satra of Majuli again started to publish an Assamese monthly under the editorship of Sridhar Barua. Assam Tara or Assam Star appeared in 1888 and was published from Dharma Prakash press of Majuli. The paper used to publish articles on the religious, historical
and other useful subjects and continued till September 1890. It ceased to exist owing to the proprietor having gone to pilgrimage. Before the publication of Assam Tara another monthly paper Assam Dipak was issued from Dharm Prakash press of Anwari Satra. It appeared in 1876 and lasted only for one year. Sir E.G. Gait said that "in the year 1875-76, two papers, one treating of science and literature and other of a religious nature were edited by natives of Nowgong. These two papers were printed in Calcutta. It is difficult to ascertain the names and publishers of the two papers. But in this context, it should be mentioned that neither Assam Dipak nor Chandrakaly was printed at Calcutta and published only in the year 1876. After three decades of the publication of Assam Tara Majuli again made a new venture in the field of Assamese journalism. Assam Pradipika a monthly journal was published in 1920 under the patronage of Sri Sri Naradev Goswami of Dakhinpat Satra. The satradhikar of Dakhinpat Satra offered Rupees seven hundred for the publication of Pradipika. Tara Prasad Chalisa of Sibsagar was one of the patrons of the paper. Assam Pradipika appeared from Dibrugarh under the editorship of Rajani Kanta Burdeol and was printed at Radha Nath Press of Dibrugarh. It was a religious journal and was devoted to the cause of the religious teachings of Sri Sri Deva Damodar, a Vaishnava saint of Assam. However, the journal also used to publish articles on literature, Science, Agriculture, Commerce and carefully avoided discussion on politics. Unfortunately from its very inception Assam Pradipika was involved in a bitter religious controversy, which started from its second issue and continued
till the end of its one year life. The contemporary Assamese journal and paper like Dashri and Assutya adopted a hostile attitude to the declared policy of Pradipika. It was conflict between the followers of Mahapurasbie and Desanada sect, two branches of the original Vaishnava cult propagated by Sri Sri Sankardev. Both Pradipika and Dashri indulged in polemics to establish their own religious ideals and in this regard crossed all the ethics of journalism. Under an assumed name one Habansanda Pathak represented Dashri and Yaspati Sarma took up the cause of Pradipika. This religious conflict between the two branches of Vaishnava cult went to such an extent that the Satriadar of Assam Sutra had to appeal to end this controversy and to work for the greater interest of the country. An Assamese monthly journal Dharma Pradip was published from Jerhat in 1928 and this was another instance of religious patronage in Assamese press. It was devoted to the cause of Vaishnava beliefs and declared its desire to offer its services to spread the teaching of Sri Sri Sankardev from house to house.

III. III So far, after or during the time of Arupaday, Assamese journalism and papers appearing under religious patronage stood for propagation of Hindu ideals and religious beliefs against the inroads of foreign missionary propaganda. However, even after the cessation of the publication of Arupaday the effort of foreign missionaries to propagate Christianity and simultaneously use of the media of press continued. An Islamic
journal also first appeared under religious patronage at the
close of the second decade of the present century.

As a monthly journal Dipti, the spokesman of the Assam
Baptist Mission appeared from Dibrugarh in July 1905. Rev. A.K.
Gurney was the first editor of Dipti. It contained news and
views on the missionary activities in the different parts of
the State. In fact, Dipti was primarily published to cater to
the needs of the American Baptist Mission in Assam. In the
first issue of the magazine, the editor expressed his desire
to see the rise of Christianity in both the hills and plains
of Assam. However, he declared that like Arunoday the new
magazine also wanted to publish articles on the subject
relating to literature and Science and assured the people to
work for their enlightenment by infusing knowledge of different
branches in the society. But Dipti was not the substitute
of Arunoday. For instance, the first issue contained thirteen
items, out of which only four were devoted to subjects of a
genral nature. It failed to usher in a secular or universal
appeal and so its circulation was limited to mostly among the
Christians of the State. Besides this, the attraction of
Arunoday being the first paper in Assam was completely
different. Dipti appeared at the completion of fifty-nine years
of Assamese journalism and hence the people accepted it as
nothing but a magazine related only to Christianity. However,
like Arunoday Dipti could enjoy a long lease of life and
continued its publication for thirty three years from various
parts of the State of Assam.
Islamic Akhbar, a monthly journal for the cause of Islamic religion could claim the status of being the first paper of the Assamese Muslim community. "Let the light of Islam spread to every house" with this ideal the paper first appeared in 1919 under the editorship of M.U. Ahmed, Parsiparia of Gauhati. Islamic Akhbar was a purely religious paper and the editor made it clear that no articles other than those relating to Islam and the affairs of the indigenous Muslim community would find place in the paper. The contemporary newspapers like Assamiya, Times of Assam and Assam Patri welcomed the birth of Islamic Akhbar. But the paper did not last long and could not maintain its regularity even from the first year of its publication. The editor explained the reasons of his failure and expressed regret that the printing presses in Assam refused to take the assignment of the printing of the paper.13 Prasheerak, the spokesman of All Assam Muslim Association appeared in 1928, as a monthly journal from Dibrugarh. It was devoted to the cause of Islam but at the same time it served the purpose of strengthening Hindu-Muslim unity, particularly in Assam. Prasheerak welcomed articles from various sections of the society on this subject and published an important article "Hindu Musalman Ekta" (Unity of Hindu-Muslim); of contemporary Assamese Hindu writer Rudhindra Nath Bhattacharya of Jorhat.14 It carefully abstained from the political controversies of the country and used to publish news items concerning the affairs of the Muslim community of Assam.
NOTES ON CHAPTER III


4. Report on the Administration of the Province of Assam, for the year 1876-1877, (Shillong, 1878), p. 155

5. Chandredev, Vol. I, No. 10


7. Ibid.

8. Milan, Vol. VI, No. 4


10. Ibid., Vol. I, No. 8


