



Evolution of Print Media in Meghalaya

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Abstract: *Welsh Presbyterian Missionaries contributed in the publication of newspapers in Meghalaya. Their motive was to promote Christian religious faith among the native Indians of this hilly region dominated by three major tribes. Shillong, the capital of Meghalaya was the then capital of Assam and NEFA (North Eastern Frontier Agency). Their initiatives led to the translation of the religious books in the local language, which laid the foundation of the Khasi literature. Newspapers in the initial stage of its publication in Meghalaya were confined more to the cultural awakening and preserving the indigenous background against the new transition. After independence, with the growth educational and political awareness, the regional newspapers had augmented the political aspirations of the people of Meghalaya. The Government of India has recognized this rising aspiration by awarding separate statehood to this hilly region which thereafter got this name – Meghalaya.*

Key Words: Christian, Khasi Literature, Welsh Presbyterian Missionaries, Regional Newspaper, Religious Books, Statehood, Tribes.

I. Introduction

North East India is surrounded by the natural beauty and rich cultural heritage. It consists of Eight States and each of the States has its legacy and history of its own. Most of the tribal kingdoms comprise the North Eastern States which is operating independently. The region also came under the British regime much later than the other part of the country. When British entered into this part of India, it automatically falls into the colonial state. Except for Manipur and Tripura, all the other areas of the region were included in the provisions of the Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, known as North Eastern Frontier Agency (NEFA) which was administered as an agency under the care of the centre. As the history witnessed, different issues and movements in these part of the country led to the development of the statehoods. With the emergence of Nagaland as a state in 1963, Meghalaya, Manipur, Tripura also attained the statehood and Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram became the Union Territories in 1972.

II. Formation of Meghalaya

British entered the then United Khasi and Jaintia Hills in the nineteenth century, mainly to construct a road from Sylhet (Bangladesh) to Assam through Nongkhaw State. While David Scott in 1820 entered into an agreement with the *Syiem* of Sohra (Cherrapunjee) by securing the permission for the road construction. However, later the *Syiem* (King) realised the mistake that they had committed. They decided to drive away the foreigners from the Hills. In the course of their fight with the British, they lost the ground and ultimately surrendered to the sovereignty. On the other side, the Raja of *Sutnga*

also came in conflict with the British. The British annexed the entire *Sutnga* Kingdom along with the Jaintia Hills and suppressed the rebellion and its leader 'U Kiang Nangbah' who was hanged publicly at *Yawmusiang* on 30th December 1862 in the presence of troops and villagers. Similarly, *Syiem* of Maharam who fought against the British was also defeated in his attempt and ultimately accepted the supremacy of the British. In the Garo Hills, due to the fight between the tribal and zamindars, the British appointed David Scott to take control of the situation. Scott, who could also be able to administer the agreement with the *Nokmas* and brought them under direct control. In this way, the entire Meghalaya was annexed by the British authority. Nevertheless, the State enjoyed the semi-independent status because of the treaty with the British Government.

On 16th October 1905 when Bengal was partitioned by Lord Curzon, the then United Khasi and Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya became part of the new province of Eastern Bengal and Assam. Later the partition was reversed, where Meghalaya became part of the province of Assam in 1912. After independence, factors like imposing Assamese as the official language and growing political aspirations influenced the hill leaders to demand a separate hill state for the indigenous tribes living in the hilly areas of the state of Assam. The Assam Reorganisation (Meghalaya) Act 1969 accorded an autonomous status on the state of Meghalaya. On 2nd April 1970 the act came into effect and thus an Autonomous State of Meghalaya was created within the State of Assam. The North-Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Act, 1971 was passed which conferred full statehood on the Autonomous

State of Meghalaya. Thus Meghalaya attained full-fledged statehood on 21st January 1972 with its own Legislative Assembly.

III. Related Literature and Existing Studies

‘The language and literature of Meghalaya’ dealt with the origin and expansion of the literary trends in Meghalaya. The author, Hamlet Bareh (1977) described how the Missionaries instigate in the development of education system in the region. Beside, the cultural, socio-economic and historical background of Garo and Khasi also detailed at length which gave greater understanding of the locale.

Newspapers played an important role in the construction of a civilised society. Therefore, it is considered as the fourth pillar of our constitution. Kitbor. W. Nongrum (1983) in ‘Ki Kot Khubor Bad Ki Kot Khasi’ showcased the historical background of newspapers that has developed in the state of Meghalaya. The Khasi newspapers which were published from this part of the country had the similar criteria in the nation building. However, the newspaper that was brought out by the Missionaries was meant for disseminating the religious faith among the people of Meghalaya.

Francis A. Khongwar (1998) had described about the Meghalaya press in his book, ‘The Essence of Journalism’. In this book, the author has made a comprehensive study by compiling the different segment of historical aspect of press, press conference, writing tips and techniques, problems and issues of the press.

‘Media in conflict situation’ describes about how the press in North East India nurtured amidst the conflicts. The author, Sanat K. Chakraborty (2000) also described about how the press manage to report event objectively in spite of the hurdles in the different region. He had also interviewed few editors from the region about the different issues concerning like the Northeast identity, human right issues, and indigenous tribe rights etc.

Hamlet Bareh (2003) in his book ‘A short history of Khasi Literature’ wrote about the tribal community in Meghalaya. The Khasi and Pnar community of Meghalaya depends on oral tradition till the advent of the Welsh Missionaries. It was Rev. Thomas Johnes who gave the Roman script to the Khasi language in 1843. The influence of Welsh Missionary and the various movements contributed for the development of social and cultural needs of Meghalaya. He also describes about the Khasi language and its literature with a view to encourage learning which is suitable for modern needs.

‘The North East Saga’ by P. K. Bandyopadhyay (2005) in his book gives a glimpse of the North East India through the history, language, culture, tradition, dance and music. The book also describes about the geographical compulsion and the

government initiatives for the socio-economic development of the region.

The ‘150 years of Journalism in Assam’ has been crafted with the aim of providing with the history and growth of press in Assam. Beside, Gobind Prasad Sarma (2007) also includes the account of a few veteran journalists who had contributed in the phase of journalism in the region. The book also includes the various newspapers of Assam that were published in Hindi, Bengali, Bodo, Khasi etc.

The state of Meghalaya which is situated in the North Eastern part of India comprises the United Khasi, Jaintia and Garo Hills districts. J. M. Phira (2010) in his book ‘Administration of land in Meghalaya’ explains about the formation of new States which resulted from the different movement that was held in the State of Meghalaya. He described about the advancement of missionary that had influence in the progress of Roman script for the development of literature. Further, the book also points out how the Christian faith was widen among the indigenous people of Meghalaya.

‘Writing on the wall, reflections on the Northeast’, Hazarika (2008) discuss about the amount of money which the centre has sanctioned to the North East India. But the basic requirements of human needs are not meet. The author had elaborated how this un management of the Government fund has led to the scarcity of connectivity, health, education and power etc. had affected the normal life of the people in the region.

‘Press in the North East’, Prof. G.P.Pandey (2013) had compiled the historical information of the press of the eight states of the North East India. Beside, the book also consists of information on the various veteran journalists of the North East India.

IV. The Transition of Journalism

Forty eight years after the inscription of the Roman script, the journalism in Meghalaya took its space in the literary work. The first Khasi newspaper was established in December 1889, ‘*U Nongkit Khubor*’ (The Messenger) under the editorship of William William. This quarterly was printed from the Star Press of Calcutta which was also the official organ of Welsh Presbyterian Missionary. The newspapers during that time gave more emphasis to the cultural orientation which preserves their own background against the new transition. The cultural awakening first marked itself in journalism before it could reach to the other fields of literature. This can be argue with the articles of U Rabon Singh on divination and eggs sacrifice had appeared in the publication in 1891-92.

The Christian publications contained news, reports and articles on their respective churches. But occasionally, the articles which were based on denominational pride also took its space in the content of the newspaper.

With the establishment of Ri Khasi Press in 1896 the growth of Khasi Journalism started in true sense. The man behind the creation of the press was U Babu Jebon Roy Mairom who is known as a prominent author and who always encouraged the printing of books and journals. The first Khasi book was printed from the press itself and till now Ri Khasi Press is considered as the one of the best printing presses of the region.

The first ever Khasi secular newspaper 'U Khasi Mynta' (The Khasi Today) was published in March 1896, edited by U Hormu Rai Deingdoh. This newspaper went in circulation for more than ten years giving due importance to Khasi religion, culture and literature. It was the period of constructive journalism, maintaining a fairly high standard of ethical values, which enhanced purely the national building thought. The newspaper offered the chance for public to share their opinions and thoughts on various social issues, which includes the interest of the farmers etc.

Sib Charan Roy who was active in journalism and who was also a writer and his contributions are mainly in



'U Khasi Mynta' - The First Khasi Secular Newspaper of Meghalaya



'U Jaintia'

the field of culture and religious strengthening. He started a periodical in 1903 entitled 'U Nongphira' (Guardian) with its impartial outlook and views on the contemporary conditions. This newspaper became an organ to define the public grievances. The paper was banned by the British administration after the First World War in 1914, as the newspaper published news story against the British Raj. But this did not prevent the paper to serve the people with their unbiased news information giving wide coverage of the struggle for Independence. The paper falls into the rage of the British and finally blacklisted. However the editor brought out another newspaper 'U Nongpynim' in 1928 to continue with his mission to disseminate truth. 'U Jaintia' (The Jaintia) was established in 1904 which also followed the same foot step of 'U Nongphira' and it gave wide coverage of social and cultural issues of the society. There were few journals which were based on cultural development for the people of the region. A bilingual journal called as 'Syngkhong Jingtup' was founded by the cultural club 'Ka Seng Jingtup' in 1959. The different articles based on festivals by R.T.Rymbai, the origin of the people by G.Costa, Khasi democracy by Prof.G. G. Swell which the touch of the cultural, social, political



‘Achik Songbad’, The First Garo Secular Newspaper of Meghalaya

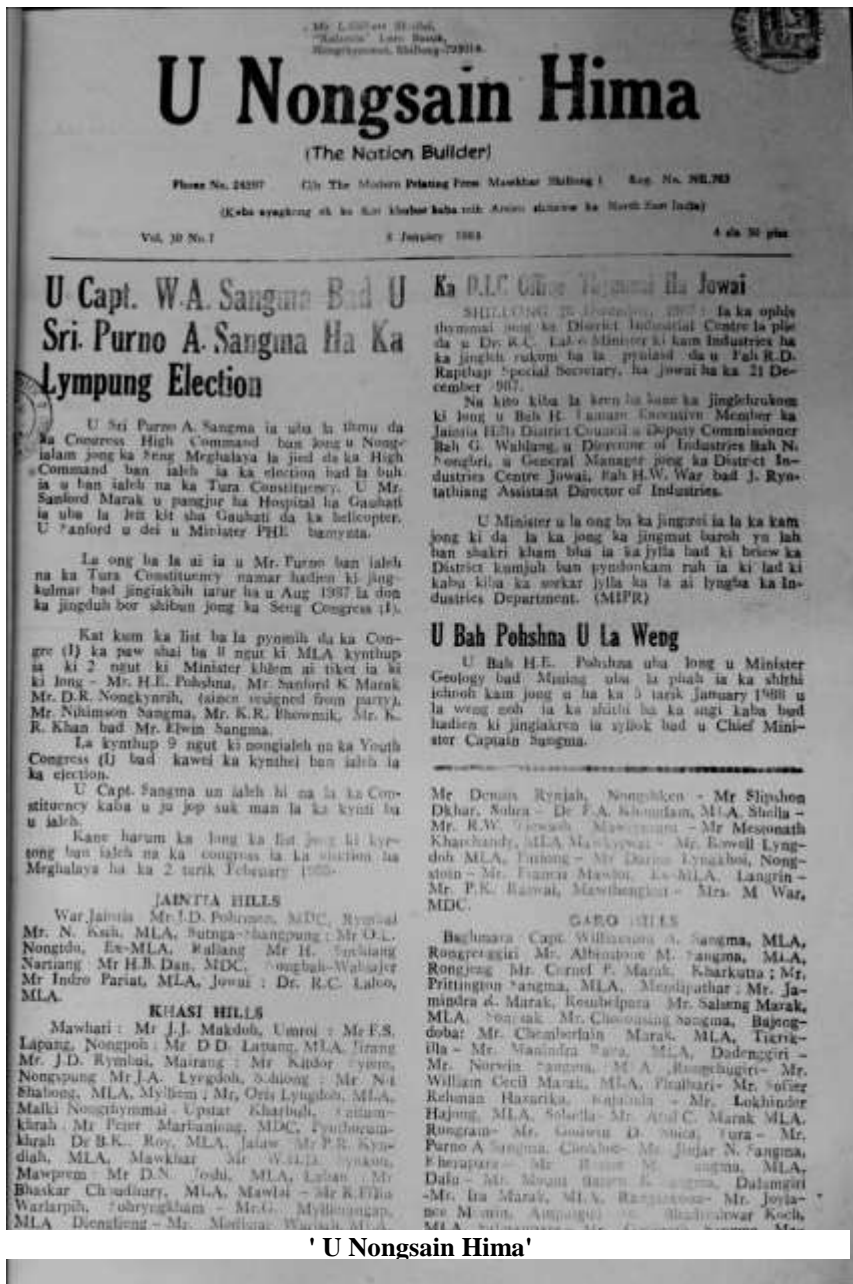
Bengali script. The printing press in Tura (Garo Hills) was also first introduced in 1881 by M.C. Mason. So the newspaper started printing in the press which resulted in faster production. With the change of Bengali script to a Roman script in 1906 there was a change to journalism in the Garo language. (Pandey, 2013)

The ‘*A’chik Kurang*’ (The voice of the Garo) was a quarterly newspaper which dedicated to the social and educational concern. The majority of the publication were ceased down owing to financial constrain. The successful newspapers which still exist are the ‘*Janera*’, ‘*Achik Sangbad*’ and ‘*Achiram*’. As stated in the book of ‘The Land and Literature of Meghalaya’ by Hamlet Bareh that the Garos which appeared from their publications, have accepted both the universal current and their own traditions in their literary creations. Even the Jaintia Hills has its contribution into the publication of Meghalaya. They are ‘*U Para Ri*’, ‘*U Jaintia*’, ‘*U Sangot*’. Newspapers like ‘*U Nongphira*’, ‘*Ka Mei Rilung*’, ‘*U Khun Ka Ri*’ and many others had also imprinted in the history of Hill State Movement in Meghalaya. Among the newspaper which was born for the national movement with the highest circulation in Meghalaya is the ‘*The Shillong Times*’. The publication was edited by S.B Chaudhury and from 12th March 1970 it became daily.

After independence, the issue of Assamese language which was to implement to the Hill people of the region evoked strong opposing. Consequently, there were increase numbers of newspaper. Among them many died and few still survived till date. The newspaper includes news on the issue related to the movements rather than anything of social, educational and economic reconstruction or the welfare. When Meghalaya got its statehood in 1972, many political parties brought out their own newspapers which therefore change the trend of journalism. Few among them are ‘*U Peitngor*’ and ‘*U Naphang*’. Today few successful newspapers like ‘*U Nongsain Hima*’, ‘*Mawphor*’, ‘*U Rupang*’ are still providing its readers the news and information without

values had ingrained in the content of the publication. ‘*Ka Rympei*’ (The home) which was initiated by the Women’s organisation to foster the ideal relationship in the home and society, but the paper did not survived long. Even the Jawai Recreation and Cultural Club had commenced with the journal ‘*Ka Thymmei*’ (The Source) which published articles of poetic thought, dress, language features etc. While ‘*Ka Ryngi*’ (The Sunlight) which also contained articles of feature story of U Tiroi Singh. The Garo Hills also saw the birth of several newspapers, mostly weeklies. The Christian missionaries had brought out the first newspaper in the Garo language, ‘*Achikni Ripeng*’ (Friends of the Garos) which came out in 1880. In real term, this newspaper is the first publication in the state of Meghalaya. The paper was jointly edited by Rev. M.C. Mason and E.G. Phips and many earliest educators contributed several articles to this Christian monthly. The usage of the Bengali script in the Garo language had been in practice since 1865. In the beginning, for a year the newspaper was in a handwritten form with the

failing on their part. The English newspapers like 'The Sentinel', 'Meghalaya Guardian', 'The Meghalaya Today' are also some of the newspapers which contributed in the journalism in Meghalaya.



Beside the improvement of printing technology from letter press to the offset printing encouraged many newspaper to go for daily publication. However, after the statehood of Meghalaya, crime reporting has gained more prominence than any other genre of reporting. This helps to fulfil the desire and satisfy the curiosity of the particular news or events. Dr. K. K. Jhunjhunwala, the Editor-of-Chief, Eastern Panorama, gave his opinion that 'For a journalist, bad news is a good news and the media here gives more importance to the negative news. Somehow the mindset has been developed that people like to read the negative news and once you give negative news, the circulation goes up. There is a need for the change in this trend'.

Despite it's relatively few in number, the newspapers in the past have played a very important role in shaping democratic ideas and informing the society. The growth of literacy and education had further helped in the development of print journalism. As such, Meghalaya witnessed the proliferation of newspapers and periodicals both in English and Khasi.

Newspapers from outside the state were also brought in daily for the circulation. With the availability of different newspapers, the people are exposed to the variant critical and independent point of views.

Nevertheless, lack of investment in the newspaper industry in Meghalaya had hampered its growth. Even today most of daily newspapers do not have printing press of their own. They depend on the nearby State for printing on daily basis. Even the news print for the publication has to be purchased from the open market which therefore reduces the profit.

V. Findings

The RNI (Registrar of newspapers for India) report shows that there are about 61 newspapers which are circulated in the state of Meghalaya. Amongst them, the highest number of newspaper published is in Khasi Language with 21 numbers of newspapers serving the 56.4% of Khasi population (source: Population Census 2001). The second highest circulated newspaper is the English with 18 numbers following with Bilingual with 11

numbers. The least number of newspapers published is in Bengali, Biata, Jaintia, Nepali and Multilingual with only 1 newspaper each.

When we look into the growth of newspapers in Meghalaya, 'U Nongkit Khubor' had initiated the humble beginning of religious newspapers in 1889. During next quarter century it declined in its establishment, however it rose again after independence. What we see today is that the newspapers which are published by the Christian

organization is very few in number in comparison to that of secular newspapers which is highest in its circulation. The first secular newspaper, 'U Khasi Mynta' had opened the platform to inculcate nationalism among the people. The post independence period saw the emergence of many newspapers; this coincides with the movements for the Hill State. However, during the end of nineteenth century, there were decline in growth of newspapers in terms of new initiatives.

Quarter century-wise initiation of the Christian and Secular Newspapers, Journals & Publications of Meghalaya			
Sl. No.	Period	No. of Newspaper, Journal & Publication	
		Christian Organisation	Secular Newspaper
1	1889 – 1914	8	2
2	1915 – 1940	3	13
3	1941 – 1966	7	22
4	1967 – 1992	1	35
5.	1993 – 2012	1	8

Source: From the book - 'The essence of journalism', 'The language and literature of Meghalaya', 'A short history of Khasi literature' & 'Ki kot khubor bad ki kot Khasi'

Table : 1 Quarter century-wise initiation of the Christian and Secular Newspapers, Journals & publications of Meghalaya

Thus the print media in Meghalaya has emerged and also created an era which was instrumental in ushering the literacy fluency in the Khasi language and as well in the culture of the indigenous people. What is required now is a media policy which would benefit the regional newspapers from all the constraint that stagnant the proper growth of the profession.

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VI. Conclusion

Many State dailies and weeklies comprise the press today in Meghalaya. Beside the English newspapers, the State also has regional language newspapers which serve the people of Meghalaya with the flavour of its own. Newspapers in the initial stage of their publication in Meghalaya were confined more to the cultural awakening and preserving the indigenous background against the new transition. After independence, with the growth of educational and political awareness, the regional newspapers had augmented the political aspirations of the people of Meghalaya. (Bareh, 1977)

The literacy rate is also one of the factors that have led to the growth of newspapers and magazines in Meghalaya. As per the Population Census of India 2011, the literacy rate of Meghalaya is 73.8% where 77.2% of this is of males and the female literacy rate is 73.8%. The current scenario is that the Meghalaya has 80816 numbers of newspapers circulated on a daily basis (source: Audit bureau of circulation). Accordingly, there are about 67 publications (Source: RNI) running in the region which comprises dailies, weeklies, bi-weeklies, monthlies, fortnightlies etc.

Presently, there are wide variety of publications in different languages which includes Khasi, Jaintia, Garo, English, Hindi, and Bengali which are in circulation with news and information. In Meghalaya publications like 'The Shillong Times', 'Mawphor', 'Achik Songbad', 'Meghalaya Guardian', 'The Meghalaya Times' and 'U Jaintia' and magazines like 'Eastern Panorama', 'TNT', 'U Lur Phira' have a good circulation record in the region.