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## BOOK REVIEW

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### Showcasing the Press of the North-Eastern India

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Pandey, G.P., (2013). *Press in the North-East*, Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Government of India, New Delhi, 171 P., Rs. 145, ISBN: 978-81-230-1840-9

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'Press' being the fourth pillar of the Indian Constitution has an important role to play in the democratic front of the country. The Indian national press was undisputedly the backbone of the freedom struggle for independence from colonial rule. The historical importance and prestige it enjoys in the society are inextricably linked to the enormous role of awareness creation and tremendous contribution to the formation of public opinion.

In these days when daily occurrences of activities unfolding within geographical and psychological proximities are consciously reported by the media especially the newspapers, a comprehensive study on the subject matter especially in case of North East India is highly essential if not necessary. Hence the book, 'Press in the North-East', has brought to an end the paucity and dearth of literature which gives an overview of the Press in the Northeast India.

The author, Prof. G.P. Pandey is the Head of Mass Communication Department, University of Assam, Silchar. In the book, he has presented detailed chronicle of the historical information related to print journalism in the Northeast. The book also stands as one of the first of its kind in the region that has comprehensive compilation which includes rare information and historical facts on press in the eight states of North Eastern Region.

The eight chapter book did not leave any stone unturned across the eight sister states of the North Eastern India. The book comprehensively talks about the Press in each of the states of Assam: Nerve centre of Awakening, Arunachal Pradesh: A steady growth, Manipur: A challenge profession, Meghalaya: Mirror of popular sentiments, Mizoram: Community based initiatives, Nagaland: The face of courage, Sikkim: Growth despite limitations and Tripura: Enlightened Royal Patronage, highlighting the history of journalism of all the North-eastern states.

The chapters of the book were meticulously

arranged through an intellectually and academically stimulating presentation to reveal and describe the growth of vernacular newspapers and journals like Khasi, Garo, Hindi, Bodo, Mising, Karbi, Nepali, Manipuri, Mizo, Tripuri and Bengali journalism in the various parts of the region.

Another distinctive feature of the book is that it portrays the evolution on growth and developments of Press on the basis of the geographic, cultural, linguistic and ideological richness and diversities of the region. The book reaffirms the development of vernacular newspapers as instrumental to creating good writers and a large readership thereby ushering in an intellectual background for comprehensive understanding of the travels and impact of the profession to the future journalist.

The book is based on the historical aspect, the details incorporated from the growth of the first newspaper to that of the use of latest technological development in the newspapers which would help to understand the development of press. Correspondingly, the content of the newspapers and publications had changed with the change of political development in the North Eastern Region.

The advent of European Civilization in India paved the way for development of modern press. Introducing printing press by the Christian missionaries of Bengal deserve the credit primarily for publishing missionary leaflets etc. *In fact, the consciousness on communication through print media such books, journals and newspapers begun with the publication of Christian Literature* (Page - 137). The author has described how the zeal of the Christian Missionaries to propagate their beliefs into this part of the region, which ultimately gained success, as being the pioneer in the print journalism.

The publication, 'Orunudo' in 1846 was published from Sibsagar, which lead the way for many to come in the limelight. According to the author, this monthly news

magazine was brought ten years after the setting up of the first printing press in Assam by O. T. Cutter and Nathan Brown. This publication had created the history in shaping the modern Assamese literature which was regularly published for over 36 years.

The missionaries' intention was not to restrict themselves to Assam but rather wanted to go beyond the shore of Assam. Similarly, in other part of the states as well, the missionaries have instigated to use the print as a medium to spread the message of Christianity. The description on every newspaper and the journal with its minute details has made the book very reliable. The book was a reflection of the antecedents that contaminated into unique history of the press in the region - from the hand-stencilled and cyclostyled journal of 'Meitie Chanu' in Manipur and 'Achikni Ripeng' from Meghalaya in 1879 which also run for a year in a hand written form to disseminate news and information to the people of the region.

The other factors which were highlighted in the book included the freedom movement and how the different newspapers and publications had intricately played their role in its different columns. The change from reporting societal events of the Britishers, to shifting their focus on news and write-ups on the diverse social and political concerns and problems faced by the indigenous tribes of the North Eastern states which saw the birth of a different kind of journalism, a dedicated journalism which stood for social reforms and public welfare, and creating opinion on issues like education, traditional law and customs and the development of the women and the society at large were also highlighted in the book.

Parallel to the struggle for freedom, the urge for the statehood in the different states of the region has also given birth to different newspapers and publications. Professor Pandey has put forward the political prerequisite to use the newspaper as a platform for the movement which ultimately gain popularity.

The other facet of journalism in the Northeast is that the newspaper and journals that are published from the region have constant fear on their freedom of reporting. The press has constant pressure from many insurgents, the government establishment, and students' organisations as well as from the non-government organisations. The newspapers in North Eastern despite its shortfall and lacking in many parts stood up against the crises when even the government remain to keep silence. The small newspaper across the region

are the one mostly who expose the various lapses of the administrations and the corruptions.

The author also illustrated the different plight of journalists in the region who have faced atrocities and even loss of their lives while performing their duties. Therefore, the book describes how the freedom of the press has been challenged many times, sometimes by the people in power and sometimes by the people with arms. *'In a nutshell, journalism in the state has become a dangerous game'*. (Page - 101)

An outstanding feature of the book is that has become a compendium with a compilation of rare photographs of veteran journalists from the past and successful contemporary print media members along with their profiles that makes it all the more interesting. The collection of old editions of newspapers and journals are also included in the book. These are either preserved in the museum or in the private residence of some eminent personalities.

The pictures of renowned Assamese journalism like Hem Chandra Barua, Jyotiprasad Agarwala, pioneers of Manipuri journalism like Hijan Irabot, Padmashree awardee from Meghalaya, Patricia Mukhim, renowned as the trend setter in the field of Mizoram journalism, Khawlhring Sapdanga, the founder editor of the first newspaper in Nagaland, Geoffrey Yaden, Bijay Bantawa, one of the senior journalist of Sikkim and Satayabrato Chakraborty, an eminent journalist of Tripura and many more were included in the book from all the eight states of Northeast.

These entire landmarks have been tinted in the book with the inference of the interviews and analysis done through the author's personal contacts and other sources. This is because no such printed document of the history of journalism of this region is available in any parts of the country. Consequence of which is that the journalists of the part are sinking into oblivion. The book is an attempt to recollect the history of journalism of Northeast and to remember the contribution of the journalists towards the profession as well.

Professor Pandey had brought out this book not only to help the students of journalism and for the people who are in the field of journalism but to all those interested to get themselves acquainted with on the issues that concerns and the history of newspapers and journalism of Northeast India who have made very important contributions in the development of press of the region and the country. □