

CHAPTER - IV

PRESS IN CACHAR

The fourth chapter 'Press in Cachar' talks about the history, origin and growth of the press in Cachar district of Assam along with brief profile of the press in Barak Valley of Assam

4.1. PRESS IN BARAK VALLEY

Like other places of India, the air of journalism started blowing in Barak Valley since the last part of nineteenth century after the establishment of a printing press in Silchar. As Bengali is the main language of the valley so the newspapers being published from here are mostly in Bengali and till today, Bengali is the key language of the valley's journalism. Prior to that, some newspapers are also brought out in other Indian languages such as English, Hindi, Manipuri and Dimasa.

Origin of journalism in Barak Valley was quite different from rest of the other country due to political and topographical distribution. The valley was undivided in the pre-independence era and was known as the Surma Valley, covering Cachar and Sylhet (now in Bangladesh). The commencement of journalism was from Surma Valley. While discussing the origin of journalism in Barak Valley, it is mandatory to discuss the journalism in Surma Valley. The history of journalism in Barak Valley is closely linked with the journalism of Surma Valley. Surma Valley was divided during partition. Sylhet district went to Pakistan and Barak Valley remained in India. The Sylhet district was a heart of Surma Valley. Sylhet had its own identity for creative works, literary invention and business. It was also the birth place of some of the great sons of Indian soil who fought for India's independence and also contributed to the field of journalism. One such legendary personality was Bipin Chandra Pal who edited the first newspaper *Priyadarshan* from Sylhet. *Priyadarshan* has attained distinguished place among the newspapers of Surma Valley. Sylhet thus, was the pioneering place of journalism in Surma Valley and from Sylhet journalism scattered in the entire valley and came to Silchar too. The first vernacular newspaper of Surma Valley saw the light of the day from Sylhet with the publication of *Srihattaprakash*

under the editorship of renowned poet Pyari Charan Das in the month of January, 1876.

Due to the lack of printing press *Srihattaprakash* was printed from Calcutta. Babu Harikrishna Gupta was the pioneer in bringing printing press in Silchar. Journalism started in Barak Valley in 1885 after the establishment of printing press in Silchar.

4.2. THE BARAK VALLEY PRESS DURING THE BRITISH PERIOD

▪ Newspapers of Cachar District

The first newspaper of Barak Valley was a Bengali weekly *Silchar* which started publishing in Cachar district in the year 1889 with Bidhubhusan Sen as its editor. There has been a controversy related to the first publication date of the earliest newspaper, *Silchar* among the journalists and researchers working in the field. But the reliable evidences have not yet been produced (Siru 1992).

Surma in 1911 was another Bengali weekly that played a very important role during the freedom movement. Its first editor was Pandit Chandraday Vidyavinode but later it was succeeded by Pandit Bhuban Mohan Bidyarnarva. This paper converted into a daily in 1914 keeping the people informed of the various developments of World War I and other events too. Bhuban Mohan had thus the uniqueness of editing the first daily newspaper published from Cachar. At the same time he was also the editor of *Samay* which was simultaneously published from Silchar. (Das, 1998). He was also the editor of *Brahman Parishad Patrika*, published in 24th April 1929, a quarterly Bengali journal of Brahmanical philosophy which was the organ of the 'Silchar Brahman Parishad'. But unfortunately, this journal stopped after the first three issues. The *Surma* being discontinued for some years in the twenties it resumed its publication in the thirties under the editorship of Babu Nagendra Shyam, the eminent lawyer of Cachar who later edited another Bengali weekly *Azad*. The *Surma* played a vital role in guiding the public opinion in Cachar district and also sometimes forced the government to note its opinion.

During the third-fourth decade of twentieth century a huge number of periodicals and literary magazines were published. In the year, 1930 a Bengali weekly *Bartaman*

started publication from Silchar under the editorship of Bhupendra Kumar Shyam. But the paper did not last long and stopped just after the three months of its publication.

In July 1937 a monthly newspaper *Krishak* started publishing under Hurmat Ali Bar Laskar's editorship. The newspaper used to give coverage on agriculture and agriculturists but still it could not impress the farmers and ceased its publication after two issues.

A monthly newspaper *Manipuri* in Manipur language came out from Silchar in the year 1939. Its editor was Samarjit Singh (B.Sc, B.L). Later it also started publishing in Bengali and survived for a long time.

A weekly newspaper *Saptak* started publishing in 1937 which gave its contribution to the freedom movement in Barak Valley. Kushi Mohan Das was its editor but after the publication of some issues it was succeeded by Gajendra Chanda Dutta.

Vijoyini the first newspaper edited by a woman editor Jotshan Chanda came out in 1940 as the organ of Silchar Mohila Samiti. Jotshan Chanda was first woman graduate of Cachar who later became the Member of Parliament. She was the wife of eminent educationist and leader A.K. Chanda.

▪ **Newspapers of Karimganj District**

During the pre-independence period another district of Barak Valley, Karimganj also contributed some weeklies and fortnightlies which played a vital role in the freedom struggle.

The first newspaper of Karimganj was published during the British period. All the credit goes to Kailash Chandra Biswas who had the distinction of publishing Sreehatta Surida, a monthly newspaper from Karimganj, in April 1890. *Prabhati*, a Bengali fortnightly edited by Krishna Kumar Aditya in 1908 was the first fortnightly newspaper published from Karimganj. Though this Bengali newspaper was short-lived but had a chequered history. Since then the era of journalism began in the valley. (Paul, 2011)

Though the growth of journalism in Karimganj was mainly associated with *Sreehatta Suridha* (1890) and *Prabhati* (1908) but the most remarkable development of journalism during the pre-independence era was the starting of fortnightly newspaper Pallibani on May 1936. As an editor Subodh Kumar Roy published it for five years but later, it shifted to Habijganj (now in Bangladesh).

The first political newspaper of Silchar was a monthly newspaper *Panchajanaya* appeared in April 1930 under the editorship of Subodh Kumar Roy. The newspaper was the mouthpiece of 'Bharatiya Juba Andolan' and thus it helped a lot to raise political consciousness among the people.

Also, *Panchajanya* and *Muktinayak* were two important names. Another weekly newspaper under the name *Jagaran* was also published which specially gave stress on democratic socialism (Bhattacharjee, 1993).

▪ **Newspapers of Hailakandi District**

During the pre-independence period some other newspapers also started publication from Silchar and Karimganj but Hailakandi had a very little contribution in this regard. A bi-weekly under the name *Adhikar* was launched in 1943. Its editor was Achinta Bhatt and Anil Biswas.

Though the contribution of journalism was very important but the newspapers of Barak Valley could not impress the people deeply, except the two noteworthy names *Silchar* and *Surma*. Since 1889 the development of journalism in Barak Valley was a mixture of unique mission freedom.

Although during the pre-independence the newspapers served the people of Barak Valley but the newspapers published from Sylhet keep dominating the people and the market of this valley. The demand for these newspapers and some Calcutta based Bengali dailies were very few. Also due to lack of proper infrastructure facility and financial support many papers stopped publishing. But along with other aggressive newspapers the *Silchar*, *Surma* and *Arunodaya* played a great role to carry forward the freedom movement.

4.3. THE BARAK VALLEY PRESS AFTER THE INDEPENDENCE

After independence in 1947 many periodicals and dailies were launched. This was the era when journalism spread throughout the valley and the mission of journalism became a profession. The young journalists took journalism as a serious profession, new trends were set up and some other developments occurred.

Also, after independence some renowned and eminent journalists of Sylhet came to India with their press and publication. *Janasakti* and *Jugashakti* were among their publication which they resumed after settling in Barak Valley, India. (Bhattacharjee,1942).

▪ Newspapers of Cachar District

Before and after independence comparing to other district, Silchar was leading in the newspaper publications in the history of Barak Valley journalism. It earns the credit for the first daily newspaper of the valley. After independence it contributed a lot of periodicals and daily newspapers with their noteworthy contribution. Till today, the daily newspapers of Silchar dominate the valley.

When *Janashakti* ceased its publication, a bi-weekly newspaper *Muktipradip* appeared in 1948 but in the next year it stopped its publication. Its editor was Baidyanath Nath from Silchar. Later, on 26th January 1950 a renowned weekly of the valley *Arunodoya* starts its publication under the editorship of Sunil Kr. Dutta Roy. This paper contributed a lot during the language movement of Barak valley. (Das, 2002).

In 17th December 1950, Baidyanath Nath started publishing another weekly newspaper *Jugasankha* which later became the most circulated paper of the valley. In 1982 it was converted into a daily newspaper with the association of a group of talented youth journalists like Atin Das, Jishu Chanda, Anadi Chakraborty and so on.

During that time *Prantojyoti*, the first daily of the Barak Valley, made its appearance. It was first started as a bi-weekly in 12th January 1956 from Silchar. Its founder editor was Jotindra Chandra Dutta who was popularly known as Kala da. This paper was first named as *Jyoti* but later it was renamed as *Prantojyoti*. It came as a daily

newspaper from 1964 and till today it is continuing its publication. It made a remarkable achievement during the language movement of Barak Valley.

Another bi-weekly *Goti* was started in 1966. Dipendra Das was its editor. Later it was converted into daily and Jotin Deb Roy took the editorship. Although it is continuing its publication, its circulation is limited.

Barak, another bi-weekly was started in 1966 under the editorship of Golam Osmani but later in 1933 Atin Das took the charge. It gives main emphasis on political articles.

Another weekly newspaper *Prantiya Samachar* was started in June 1964. Its editor was Horendra Chandra Sen. In 2nd October 1990 it became bi-weekly and Aatur Rahman became the editor.

In the history of journalism of Barak Valley a notable name *Sonar Cachar* was launched as a bi-weekly on May 1975. Its founder-editor was Ranobir Roy. The age of renowned newspaper *Sonar Cachar* can be considered as the golden age of the Barak journalism. It was converted as a daily since early eighties. It was the first newspaper of this valley which adopted off-set press and was published in a standard size newspaper. Within a few years of its publication it emerged as the largest circulated newspaper in the North- East but later due to financial instability the paper ceased its publication.

Another weekly newspaper edited by Taimur Raja Choudhury under the name *Samayik Prasanga* was started in 1977-78, which later became bi-weekly. Then it was converted into a daily and was renamed as *Samayik Prasanga*. It is printed on colour off-set. It is the second largest circulated paper in Barak Valley.

Bhudev Bhattacharjee started a Bengali weekly *Cachar Times* on 12th September 1977 and continued upto 1987. Then Deepan Dewanjee took the editorship and converts the paper into a Bengali bi-weekly which is still in publication.

The period of eighties is considered as the golden period of the newspapers in the valley. During that period innumerable periodicals came into existence. Among which some of them are continuing and some have stopped their publications. *Anchalik*

Barta by Sajal Kanti Biswas was started on 12th January 1981. *Bartalipi* a weekly newspaper was started by Sanat Kairi in January 1985. This newspaper is still in publication under the editor ship of Partha Bhattacharjee. Sanat Kairi was also an editor of a weekly *Abosan* which ceased its publication just after six months.

In 31st December 1982 *Sonar Desh*, a bi-lingual weekly, started its publication which later turned into a bi-weekly on 4th July 1992. It is continuing its publication.

A Bengali fortnightly *Barak Darpan* started its publication on 25th December 1989. It is converted into weekly on 5th January 1990. Its present editor is Babli Adhikari.

In 1st January 1991 another Bengali newspaper *Silchar Times* made its appearance as a bi-fortnightly under the editorship of Sanant Kairi which became daily on 14th April 1994. This paper often carries out good writing with criticism of the working and policy of administration.

Seema Kumar started a Hindi monthly, *Prerna Bharati* in 2001. It became fortnightly in 2003 and in 2005 it became a weekly. Besides general news of events it gives special coverage on news related topics to the Hindi speaking people of Barak Valley.

Apart from the aforesaid newspapers there are *Amar Barak*, *Barak Darpan*, *Matribhumi*, *Anjana*, etc. Also there are some fortnightlies such as *Barak*, *Cachar Lipika* and *Pally Darpan*. Beside this *The Frontier Sun*, English daily was published by 'Sonar Cachar Group'. The paper stopped its publication due to financial crisis. Its editor was Mridul Roy. *Eastern Progress*, English monthly edited by Pijyush Kanti Das started in December 1996. It was a progressive newspaper which mainly deals with the problems of North-East, especially the Southern Assam. But after a few issues it ceased the publication. Other two English newspapers *The Energy Era* and *The Oil Fields Times* also ceased the publication. The former was publication of 'Sonar Cachar Group' and the latter, a publication of 'Jugasankha Group'. (Das, 1998).

▪ Newspapers of Karimganj District

A new development in the post-independence period was the growing of commercialization of the press in Karimganj. It was that period when people came

forward to take journalism as profession. The importance was given to advertisements. Thus, it can be said that before the independence the newspapers were not commercial but after the independence because of the professional attitude emphasis on commercials increased.

The first successful commercial weekly from Karimganj is *Jugashakti* which actually made its appearance on 6th December 1936 from Sylhet. In 1947 after the partition of India, the paper was shifted to Karimganj. Its editor was Bidhu Bhusan Choudhury. Mr. Choudhury's son Samarjit Choudhury became the editor after the expiry of his father. It is the oldest urban based newspaper which is still in publication with a circulation of nearly 3000.

Another weekly paper *Ganabani* started publishing from Karimganj in 1948. The paper was edited by J. L. Goswami. *Purbachal*, another Bengali weekly, exists on 15th March 1950 under the editorship of Subodh Chandra Dhar which ceased publication due to financial instability. In 1954 another weekly newspaper *Karimganj* started publishing from Karimganj Press. Its editor was Nabokumar Bhattacharjee.

A monthly newspaper *Chabuk* made its existence in 1958. Its first editor was Bomkesh Biswas. Later Nirmal Das, Jyotirmoy Choudhury and Pulen Das took the editorship. This paper was initiated by the student leader, Ranjan Das. The mission of *Chabuk* was to protest against corruption and contemporary malpractices of local administration. It also launched anti-corruption campaign through its writing against the government officers, public administrators and society's influential persons.

In April 1962 a complete rural based bi-lingual (Bengali and Dimasa) weekly under the name *Dristipath* started publishing from Karimganj and Halflong. Its Bengali section was edited by Bhupendra Kumar Singh and Dimasa section was edited by Benani Dampri and Joyraj Singh.

Kripesh Chandra Bhattacharjee started a first bi-weekly newspaper on 17th July 1972 under the name *Danka*. Later it became weekly in 1975. This newspaper gave emphasis on investigative reporting.

Another weekly *Kushiara* started its publication on 30th November 1976 under the editorship of Ramkrishan Banik. This paper is continuing its publication till date.

A bi-weekly newspaper *Nabobarta Prasanga* edited by Habibur Rahaman came into existence in April 1986. This newspaper is published simultaneously from Karimganj and Diphu. The uniqueness of this paper is that, it is the only newspaper of Karimganj, which circulated to Saudi Arabia

Challenger Barta the only English weekly of Karimganj, started on 28th February 1994. Its editor was B.G. Bhattacharjee a retired A.C.S. officer. This newspaper mainly deals with the problems of the urban life.

A bi-lingual (published in both Assamese and Bengali) and bi-monthly magazine type newspaper *Kalikusum* was launched on September 1995 under the editorship of Atiqur Rahman Choudhury.

The most commendable development of the journalism in Karimganj was on 6th June 1996. On this day *Dainik Protibedan*, a daily newspaper made its appearance under the editorship of G. L. Goswami. Unfortunately, the paper had lost its publication only after three months. Within a short life of its appearance this newspaper made notable achievements in the development of journalism in Karimganj District. Moreover its style and way of presentation was fascinating but due to lack of modern technology off-set printing and financial crisis, it could not survive for a long period.

There were some other publications from Karimganj which couldn't continue its publication after a few issues. They are *Samayer Ahban*, *Sangbad Davani*, *Mahanayak*, *Aganiban*, *Ghar Ghar* and *Sjingla Prabaha*. It has been found that at present there is no daily newspaper in Karimganj. All the newspapers published from Karimganj are weekly, fortnightly or monthly.

▪ **Newspapers of Hailakandi District**

Before independence Hailakandi District could not provide any contribution regarding the newspapers. In the year of independence the first newspaper, *Janamat* came into existence. Its founder-editor was Dr. Amulya Ratan Sengupta. The famous freedom fighter Birendra Kr. Das, also contributed his articles. One of his articles 'Pukur

Churi' influences the readers to a great extent. It was related to the P. W.D. functioning. Against such writing, an engineer of that department filed a case in Shillong which affect its publication.

Nabayan and the *Cachar* were two weeklies started publishing in 1950. The founder-editor of *Cachar* was Santaram Shekhar Bhadra. Later after his resignation from the post, Digendra Nath Kabirangan became the editor in-charge. After that Amulya Choudhury took the charge of editorship for some days. In 1972 the post was succeeded by M.L.A. Santosh Kumar Roy but later he also resigned. At present the newspapers had stopped their publication. (Bhattacharjee, 2002).

Another weekly newspaper, *Dhaleswari* made its appearance in 1967. Its editor was Nani Gopal Dey who was a renowned freedom fighter. In the year 1947 he became the student Congress General Secretary and actively engaged himself in the politics. After his joining in the Forward Block, then P.S.P, thereafter Janata Dal he stopped the publication of *Dhaleswari*. Recently under the assistance of Sankar Dey this newspaper has been resumed from Silchar.

Several newspapers were published during 1950s but unfortunately none of them survived. Amulya Choudhury started *Prantik* from the Bharati Press. *Udayan* edited by Sudhir Dutta from Hailakandi District which later shifted to Dharmanagar and now in Tripura. A newspaper *Swaraj* published by Shakti Dhar Choudhury. Harendra Chandra Paul started a weekly, *Janakalyan*, *Jagoroni* published by Nripen Kr. Choudhury and Krishna Singha's *Ganadut*.

In the year 1950 another two English weekly newspapers *The Sentinel* and *The Voice* were published from Hailakandi Town. The former was started by Captain Subodh Dutta and the later by Amiya Kr. Nandi. The latter was continued only for six months.

In 1960-61 during the movement of 'Bhasha Andolan' (Language Movement), a newspaper *Nabodhara* came into existence under the edition of joint editors Chandra Purkayastha and Usha Ranjan Chandra.

A weekly paper *Purbayan* was published in 1969. Its editor was renowned writer Saktidhar Choudhury.

A newspaper *Gramya Jiban* made its appearance in 1972-73. This newspaper was edited and published by Hari Prasanna Sen with the assistance of Abdul Latif Laskar.

In 1974-75, Hari Prassanya Sen started another newspaper *Grammya Adhikar*. It ceased its publication after two years which was later revived in 1980 by Nazmul Hussain Mazumdar and Matiur Rahman under the name *Asanta*. Nazmul Hussain Mazumdar also independently published a weekly newspaper *Uttar Parba*

Another weekly newspaper *Banga Shree* made its appearance in 1978 under the editorship of Tayabur Rahman Mazumdar. Later on this weekly was renamed to *Dalim* which is continuing its publication since 17 years.

At the end of 1980s Abdul Kalam Mazumdar started publishing a weekly newspaper *Dibakar*.

Cachar Tribune, English daily was launched in 1981. Since its commencement it is a regularly published newspaper edited by Ujjal Kr. Deb. The most commendable part is that, it is the only English weekly from Hailakandi.

Jalanta Sengupta started a weekly *Mahakal* in 1980 which generally published interesting news. Unfortunately, after a few months this paper stopped its publication.

Bajra Kishan a weekly was edited by Debashish Purkayastha which survived just for two months. It was later revived in June 1993 under the editorship of Subhas Ch Roy who edited it upto January 1994. With the publication of *Bajra Kishan* a new trend in journalism began which influenced the readers to some extent.

During 1980s *Gana Surya* and *Milon* made its appearance. Chandan Ghosh is the editor of the former while Biswajit Paul Choudhury is the editor of the later. Both the papers are no longer in publication.

Recently, a Manipur weekly, *Barak Tompak* has been launched by the editor Phanindra Singha.

Barak Jyoti a weekly started from Panchgram under the editorship of Abdus Sukkar Choudhury.

The newspapers published from Barak Valley are *The Eastern Chronicle*, *Preranabharati*, *Dainik Jugashankha*, *Samayik Prasanga*, *Dainik Gati*, *Prantojyoti Dainik*, *Nabobarta Prasanga*, *Jugashakti*, *Dalim*, etc.

No doubt with lots of advancements, striking changes have occurred in the field of journalism in this part of the globe. Presently, with the introduction of modern technology newspapers are printed from off-set press with colour photograph. Many newspapers have correspondents in big cities to get fresh coverage of national and international events. Also, daily newspapers have their advertisement offices in different places. Lots of other such changes have taken place in the field of journalism which has paved the way of new developments in journalism.

The press in Barak valley is not only concerned with the layout of the paper but it give equal concentration to its contents. It also gives stress on development issues along with political issues. Almost all the newspapers in Barak Valley have basically a rhetoric style. It basically follows the editor's construction. After independence many newspapers and magazines started flourishing. From all the three districts the publications rolled out frequently along with the circulation of the Calcutta based newspapers. Gradually, some of the locally emerging publications got established and they replaced the Calcutta based ones in many respects.

Thus, after independence the press not only changed its spirit and objective of the publication but it has also changed its contents and technology. Though it brought into its coverage various news, themes and sections of society but in reality political news dominated the press. Along with modern technology and professionalism the journalism has been coming under the eclipse of yellow journalism.

Till now, no systematic effort has been made to study the kind of socio-economic development issues, issues related social aspects and cultural aspects covered by the language press in Silchar town of Assam. The study thus arise the question: What are the kinds of social issues covered by the language press in Silchar town of Assam? Thus, the study makes an attempt to answer this question by analyzing the content of two leading Bengali newspapers of Silchar town of Assam for a period of one and half year.