

ABSTRACT

In the north-eastern part of the India, Assam has a unique and distinctive history in the sphere of news media which developed out of the specific processes of encounter and interplay between historical circumstances, institutions and individuals. In the annals of Indian journalism, regional histories like the history of the press and news media of a marginal province like Assam have been inadequately accounted for. This study, which centres on the specific processes through which Assamese news media originated and developed, takes in to account its early trajectories in the domain of pre-print communication practices, newspapers and private satellite television news.

News media in the modern sense of the term in the Assamese language arrived in the province via the efforts of the American Baptist Missionaries and their monthly paper *Orunodoi* in the year 1846. The second monthly *Assam Bilasinee* which came out in the year 1871 was, however, the first publication that was brought out through a local initiative. Result of the pioneering effort on the part of the visionary abbot, Sri Dutta Deva Goswami of the Auniati Sattra of Majuli, *Assam Bilasinee* provided an early indication of the drive and vision in co-opting the technology of print by leading members of the Assamese society. Thus, in the first phase of the development of the news media in the state, like in many other parts of India, it is chiefly the religious forces and controversies under a colonial regime which shaped the nature and character of the periodicals and newspapers. In this context, the role played by *Orunodoi* was significant as the missionary monthly transcended its propaganda role, and broadened the mental horizon of the readers across the province by enlightening and ushering in new ideas and knowledge. This development however, did not entirely originate in altruistic motives as the contents of the monthly was carefully edited by missionaries like Nathan Brown to fit in with their proselytizing objectives. The ‘civilizing’ goals of the American Baptist Missionaries was the key factor in this regard as they wanted to make inroads to the hearts and minds of the local readers in the common language, and thereby create a more responsive field for the reception of the main tenets of Christianity. In the subsequent stage of the development of the Assamese press in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, different social, cultural and political cross-currents influenced the trajectory of the newspapers and periodicals. As a regional and middle class developed under a colonial government through education and exposure in Calcutta, emergent members of the class started

publishing periodicals, magazines and journals with literary, cultural and other social orientations which largely sought to disseminate useful knowledge combined with articles and commentaries.

In the socio-economic environment of the new millennium where media is a profitable business, sections from politicians, corporate houses and owners of other media have made a beeline to join the television business to exercise influence and garner profit in many directions. Accordingly, the present study contextualizes the emergence of private satellite television news in the Assamese language through a narrative account of the background, origin and the individual owners who launched *NETV* (North-East Television) in Guwahati.

Thus, the overall aim and objective of the study is to identify and analyse the origin, processes and trends in the evolution of Assamese news media from its pre-print traditions, early colonial era press and the trend of private satellite news television channels in the new millennium. For the purpose the study ventures into different time periods while highlighting the factors and processes contributing to the emergence of each of the type of news media considered here. It is a historical study basing itself largely on secondary sources and primary sources wherever necessary.