

## **Kanchenjunga and Sikkim Press: How Media Started Its Practice in Sikkim**

Pooja Basnett<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Silajit Guha<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ph.D Research Scholar, Dept. of Mass Communication, Assam University

<sup>2</sup> Associate Professor, Sikkim University

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**Abstract:** The article studies the evolution of press (newspapers and magazines) in Sikkim. The study focused on the origin of press and its subsequent growth and for the study, the researcher applied Historical Method. This article discusses how Kanchenjunga, first Nepali monthly magazine which started its publication in 1957 contributed to setting the path for journalism in Sikkim. The article also tries to place the process of building of public opinion in Sikkim from a historical perspective. It has been the attempt to find out the newspaper tried to shape public opinion and tried to develop societal consensus towards a more democratic narrative during Chogyal era and subsequent merger of Sikkim with India.

**Keywords:** Press, Sikkim, King, Kanchenjunga, Sikkim Herald

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### **I. Introduction**

The press in India started in 1780 with Hicky's Bengal Gazette. The reach of newspapers was very slow in Sikkim, and movement primarily started with independence on August 15, 1957. During the Kings rule in Sikkim there was no constitution and the administration of Sikkim functioned with proclamations. If the King wanted to announce/notify, he would come out with a proclamation like proclamation No 1, Proclamation No 2, etc. The information that the king wanted to share with the public would be published in the Gazette. All kinds of announcements and rules were circulated to the masses through the proclamation in the Gazette from school announcements to rules announcement, appointments, promotions, transfers etc. The Gazette was the only source of information. Until Sikkim became a part of India, Gazette had very high importance as an all *Darbar Ghosna* (information from the royals) was done only through the Gazette.

In the year 1956, the Information Service of India, Gangtok, brought out a weekly newspaper titled *Bulletin* in English, which was published in Nepali titled as *Adhikari Vigyapti*, published by the office of the Political Officer, Gangtok and printed by the Govt. of India Press, Gangtok. The *Bulletin* carried news reports and articles highlighting all round progress made by India after independence. It gave importance to what was happening in India. To counter this, under the rule of King Tashi Namgyal, the Raj Darbar started the publication of *Sikkim Herald* in 1956. The objective was to promote the development work undertaken by the monarch in Sikkim and the target was the people of Sikkim. Sikkim Herald was a magazine and was published once every few months. Prior to 1962, the Sikkim Herald magazine was brought out in English only and later sometime in 1962, saw the birth of its editions in Bhutia and Nepali languages as well.

According to The Gazetteer of Sikkim (1891), Nepalis with 56 per cent (including Murmi) constituted a majority of the population followed by the Lepchas (19 per cent) and Bhutias (16 per cent). There were other constituents like the Khambus and slaves. More than a hundred years later, the share of Lepcha population has gone down to 14 per cent whereas that of the Nepalis climbed to almost 70 per cent with the Bhutias constituting more or less the same proportion. All these three ethnic groups have their own language, culture and social practices, and have a strong socio-cultural bond among themselves (*Risley, 1894*)

### **II. Kanchenjunga**

The biggest introduction to the history of journalism in Sikkim came after the introduction of *Kanchenjunga*, the first Nepali monthly magazine which started its publication in 1957. Though Kashiraj Pradhan did the ground work for *Kanchenjunga*, its editor was Nahakul Pradhan. Kashiraj Pradhan was a man of many experiences; he was a literary genius and was backed by a rich family. He started the publication of *Kanchenjunga* after he was well experienced as a reporter working for Gorkha Sansar. It was a journal in Nepali but published from Dehradun. He had also worked on the English newspaper Hindustan Standard, published from Calcutta. Kashiraj was the one to start the first news magazine which was privately owned and meant for the general public. Thus Kashiraj can be called as the father of Journalism in Sikkim.

Under the Prime Ministership of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Sikkim and India signed a landmark treaty in the year 1950, referred to as the Indo-Sikkimese Treaty. Under this treaty, Sikkim was declared as a

protectorate of India with matters related to defence, external relations and communications coming under direct control of the Indian Government. All other matters were left to the purview of the King of Sikkim.

Before the birth of '*Kanchenjunga*', the first Nepali monthly magazine, a few other journals existed. These journals were more feature based and did not delve on political or socio-cultural aspects prevalent in the society. Hence they failed to connect with the larger masses. *Amulya-Ratna*, was one such journal. Published in 1948, it was not printed but hand-written. APATAN Society had *Pushpanjali* and there was *The Pole-Star* published by Mahananda Poudyal in the year 1951. Hence, was needed a medium to fill up the vacancy that existed and this led to the publication of a monthly Nepali magazine '*Kanchenjunga*' in 1957. This magazine was started as a political magazine but later they also included literature, poetry, story etc. and it progressed in a good way forward, however, the main focus was always politics.

Unlike today with many parties contesting elections, earlier in Sikkim there were only two parties namely Sikkim National Party & Sikkim State Congress. The National Party was supported by the Durbar. Kashi Raj Pradhan was the State Congress chief, his motive of wringing the paper was purely political so the paper could be ran as a party paper. However, the start he gave to journalism was exceptional and this magazine reached the masses and educated them. True journalism in Sikkim started with *Kanchenjunga*.

As published in *Nirman*, in the first edition of *Kanchenjunga*, Shri Nakul Pradhan's name was printed as editor/publisher but Kashiraj Pradhan himself did the editing. In the very first editorial report, it was written that there was no regular magazine published from Sikkim before *Kanchenjunga*.

*Kanchenjunga* continue for 15 years from 1957. Shri Kashiraj Pradhan faced difficulty in publishing *Kanchenjunga* as it was a monthly publication and the annual subscription charges was Rs. 3 and advertising fees was also minimal therefore for purchasing of paper and printing charges he had to shell out from his own pocket which was also sometimes difficult thus it had to be rested after two years. Again on the request and behest of old writers from Sikkim, Nepal, Darjeeling, Assam along with Nepal Late King Pach Maharaj Bir Bikram Sahadev, Late Pach Maharaja Saheb Tashi Namgyal and Indian political officers like Shri I.J Bahadur Singh's, many encouraging messages had been sent to the *Kanchenjunga* and its editor. Thus, it restarted in 1962 and was distributed in Sikkim, Bhutan, Nepal, Assam, Darjeeling, Dehradun. After a service of 11 years, it had to be stopped from October 1, 1972. *Kanchenjunga* can be considered as one of the primary mediums for the upliftment of social, political and literal conditions in Sikkim against the background of a socially suppressed Sikkim. (*Nirman*, 2005)

The first edition of *Kanchenjunga* highlighted different political parties, education, health news and had few stories. It also had poems. But the main focus was politics. In the second edition, Kashiraj Pradhan described in detail about Sikkim Bikash Yogana. He spoke about festivals like Dasai Tiwar. He openly expressed his views on issues of casteism in politics.

Kashiraj Pradhan was against the caste based seat reservation system that was prevalent in Sikkim and he did not fall back in writing about his opinions. In an editorial dated November 15, 1957 he wrote on communal harmony. "Here all common Bhutia, Lepcha, Nepali & others are living together since hundreds of years. In a small country like Sikkim if there be good communal harmony, Sikkim will be developed, hope to get such harmony."

Based on the General Elections of 1958, in the editorial on April 15, 1958, Kanchenjonga started talking about the seat reservations for Bhutia, Lepcha, Nepali & others. State congress' demand was to abolish the Primary Election & out of 3 parts - 1 part of seat for General National Party and Praja Sammalan had raised the voice against the general seat because that was the seat reserved for Sikkimese Bhutia, Lepcha, Nepali and others and without any community difference they could fight in that seat. Rest of the seats was allotted for different communities.

In an edition dated November 15, 1966, Kanchenjonga stated that such representation given in the council or any other government service based on caste or community is needless and will not develop any country in the world with such strategy. Everyone in Sikkim is equal and should get opportunities based on their personal capabilities and not on caste. Instead, education must be emphasized, make the poor richer, turn underdeveloped to developed and such should be the prime focus of every country. During the 3<sup>rd</sup> general council election *Kanchenjunga* editions on December 15, 1966 stated that voters names should be in the list from the residence, they should have enrolled in Sikkim Subject Register and by 1<sup>st</sup> March 1967 they should have reached 21 years – only on this basis they should be allowed to vote.

Kashiraj belonged to the Sikkim State Congress and he also promoted his party through his paper. *Kanchenjunga*. In its December 15 edition, 1957, he stated that until and unless the primary election is not removed and communally set distribution is not removed slowly, the congress will not contest in the next state election. Sikkim State Congress does not believe in community based reservation of seats. *Kanchenjunga* in its second year of operations, edition 11 & 12, on the election result decision it stated under the heading 'Chunnaw Muddha Bishay ko Memorable Phaisla'. News was published that Kashiraj Pradhan, Sonam Tshering, Nakul Pradhan, Thendu Bhutia have been done injustice by the election tribunal. Election procedure has been

dishonored, result was not as per the usual law, the case of these four people should once more be reopened and tribunal's decision should be ignored among others. A memorandum had also been submitted to the Chogyal King to reopen the case. The Chogyal on 4<sup>th</sup> Sept had issued a general notice saying:

- Kashiraj Pradhan, Nakul Pradhan & Sonam Tshering as per the verdict of the case earlier were not permitted to be a council for 6 years but Chogyal reduced 6 yrs to 6 months and for Thendu Bhutia it was reduced to 3 yrs from 6 years. And this will be applicable from May 25, 1959.
- Martam Tobden and Thendu Bhutia's elections which were cancelled will again be reelected from Central Election seat Lachen Poling Station where also reelection should be held. Advisor Rai Bahadur Tashi Dadul Densapa & Chief Executive Officer Shri Motichand Pradhan was to be given charge of Election Committee and accorded responsibility to conduct three elections and re-elect in Lachen. (*Nirman, 2005*)

In Sikkim, political development was in process from 1958 – 59. In a 20 member council, 14 seats were by voting & six seats were honorary. In this election, one seat was for general candidate, 13 seats based on caste from Sikkim State Congress, total 8 members (Nepali, Bhutia, Lepcha) (though SS Congress was against caste reservations). From two parties of Sikkim National party, 4 bhutia, lepcha & from independent group one Bhutia and one lama was elected. After the loss of Sikkim state Congress in the 2<sup>nd</sup> election, his paper stated that SS Congress could not form Government, only executive council was set up and half of the Department. was kept as reserved so that a two faced ruling government was established. In the editorial titled 'Republic Side', it stated that Sikkim's political situation was weak and cast doubts on how far will Sikkim State Congress be able to travel further in order to get its goals peacefully.

Kashiraj though used his paper to promote his party but he never failed to educate and guide the people. In the edition dated 15 Nov, 1958 his paper stated, "If the coming election be without bias, fearless and without communal tension we can understand 56,000 voters' way of thinking". In editorial titled 'Why to vote' it was stated that "Everywhere there was a meeting asking for votes, some were saying if you don't vote for him he will be avoided or boycotted from the community. Such rumors were being spread". The editor spoke on people's dilemma on whom to vote for they were stuck between castes and favors to be returned.

In the issue on Oct 16, 1962 in *Kanchenjunga* under the editorial heading 'Prasasan Ma Pabitrata', Kashiraj Pradhan had discussed about democracy in various ways. "Democracy's aim was to protect all communities of the country, citizen's fundamental rights and equal treatment by any Govt. The Govt. who wanted only party interests will never be able to do anything for the country's betterment".

*Kanchenjunga* in its second year and in its 9 & 10 edition focused on voting debate - In 1958 election, the 8 independent party and National Party's defeated candidates had filed a case against 2 members of election commission for not undertaking elections as per election laws. On May 25, case verdict was out and it dismissed 3 successful candidates of Executive Council and 2 other Council Elections. This was a remarkable decision in the history of Sikkim. On May 25, 1959, the SS Congress had called a working committee meeting at Singtam against the decision of the election case because their main leaders were out from the council membership. Many people had come from all corners of Sikkim to attend the meeting to pass a resolution that SS Congress, whenever and whatever decision it takes, the public should be ready for action. To decide on the future course of action, a high level committee was set up under Kashiraj Pradhan, Shri BB Goorung, Abichandra Khanal, Adhiklall Pradhan & Thendu Bhutia. (*Nirman, 2005*)

From Sept 13, 1959 *Kanchenjunga* was stopped for two years and 9 months and again started publishing from August 23, 1962.

*Kanchenjunga* not only wrote about Sikkim, it also tried to provide information on life around Sikkim. It commented on the national language of Bharat in *Kanchenjunga* under the heading 'Bharat Ko Rastriya Bhasa'. It is written in the editorial that most of the people in Bharat are Hindi speaking or similar to Hindi speaking languages. Hindi is Bharat's common language. Previously English speaking people used to learn Hindi for general use and that is why Hindi is the best choice for a national language and there is no doubt that the Govt. language of choice should be Hindi.

Nathu La border was open until 1962. Nathu La is a mountain pass in the Himalayas connecting Sikkim with Tibet, China's Autonomous Region. Prior to 1962, this border was used by the people of Sikkim and Tibet for trade where items like kerosine, aata, maida, vegetable, ghee would be carried to Tibet from Sikkim. But in 1962, Indo Chinese war broke out and since then Nathula pass was closed. No one was allowed to cross the border via Nathula. The border was sealed and trade was stopped by this route. Army was deployed across the whole border. After the border was sealed, information spread across the world that Indo China war had started in Nathula. This brought foreign press in Sikkim. The reporters were made to wear army uniform and caps and taken to places where the war was taking place. After 1962 all Indian national dailies like Times of India, Indian Express, Statesman, Hindustan Times, India Today, Deccan Herald, Hindustan Samachar, Amrita Bazaar Patrika came in and started operating from Sikkim during the time of the war. They then started writing on Sikkim and only then Sikkim got exposed to the outside world.

On May 1, 1963, *Kanchenjunga* also carried a report on the Chinese agitation in 1962 regarding Bharat - China relationship under the heading of 'Bharat China Sambanda'. The editorial mentioned that in international relations, a nation needs to be aware of political affairs and how much they should trust one another. And for this the best example provided was the India China relationship. The nation having different ideology/thinking should be very conscious as it would be a great betrayal as it happened in Oct-Nov of 1962, as it felt that India was stabbed from the back. The political interest of Kanchenjunga can be seen in this article, for it was a supporter of the merger with India in the later years.

During 1963, Sikkim's political situation was uncertain. In *Kanchenjunga*, under the heading 'Chourasta Sikkim' (Sikkim at the crossroads), it was written that although the Chinese agitation of 1962 was over, doubts still persisted. Sikkim was caught between two countries, China and India. Indian side had taken up possible measures to save Sikkim, people were satisfied and were ready to face and would sacrifice for their country Sikkim. This article can also be seen as a hint of merger that was to come.

About Kashmir's issue, *Kanchenjunga* stated that "Kashmir's problem has become very serious and that need not be mentioned but during the 36-37 years, the agreement on Kashmir is still under consideration. Pakistan's influence on Kashmir frequently disturbed the peace in the region. For India, the Kashmir problem was developing as a serious one. It seems to be an incurable wound. India can only kill Kashmir's soul. Likewise Jungar and Hyderabad merged in India similarly Kashmir should also be merged with India. If you do this then only Kashmir's soul will be under guard/safe forever".

*Kanchenjunga*, in the 4th year and edition 23, it stated about corruption under the heading 'Bharstachar' meaning corruption. It states that maximum corruption in any country will be found in Government employees and businessmen. To try and reform their habit, to end the corruption, punishment is necessary but in today's society it is nil. If caught, one will give bribe the magistrate, and hire a good lawyer. It's a chain reaction and to improve society and country, it is very important to improve the habit of Govt. servants and businessmen.

In *Kanchenjunga*, in the editorial of 'Sikkim Sahitya Sava' Shri Pradhan wrote about common language of Sikkim being Nepali, official language being English, some percentage of the population speaking Bhutia and Lepcha and that it was necessary to improve and promote all these languages of Sikkim.

The following article published in 1965 shows that the paper supported democracy and merger with India and the article also shows the boldness of *Kanchenjunga*. With the heading 'Sikkim ko Rajnaitik Samasya Ra Sankatkolin Awasta' (Sikkim's political problems and emergency situation) was published and carried the information that it is known from the Chogyal's press conference that with the winter season of 1965, Gram Panchayat will be formed by election. How will the Gram Panchayat be formed, how will it be, what kind of responsibilities will it have, how will the Vidhan Sabha be, how will the elections be, after election what kind of rule will be there, were all left unanswered. No information on such matters was given by the ruling side (Chogyal). However, all the parties had the same view that election should be held without any delay.

There were many unbiased reports in *Kanchenjunga* too, one of which is the one published in the 7th year in its 2, 3 & 4 edition - The arrest of Shri Lal Bahadur Basnet on Sept. 10, 1966 by Sikkim Police for Anti National activities, was published in *Kanchenjunga* News - 'Sikkim National Congress joint secretary Shri Lal Bahadur Basnet was arrested on 10 Sept 1966 by police under Bidhan Section 124/A on account of Anti National Activities and Chief Magistrate of Sikkim has released him on a bail of Rs. 1 lakh. It is known that Shri Basnet had written in one of the newspapers of Calcutta about Anti National talk. Previously Shri Basnet was Assistant Magistrate in Sikkim and after being dismissed from the post he went to Nepal and was working as an editor in a local paper. There was some disturbance and he was sentenced to jail. Post release he came back and settled in Kalimpong. He was also the joint secretary in S.N Congress. It is also said in *Kanchenjunga* that in the History of Sikkim 124 (A) section on anti national case, this was the first such case in Sikkim'. (Nirman, 2005)

Some articles questioned the government directly such as the one published on 1 Oct, 1966, On Sikkim's three year development plan under the heading Afnu Kura (Self Saying) it states that the Govt. of Sikkim had prepared the three year developmental plan and the same has been studied by the Foreign Ministry of India and Development Commission after coming to Sikkim and discussed with Sikkimese officers and sanctioned Rs. 10 crores for financial help. However, the sanctioning of Rs. 10 crores was only known from news or rumors but the fact is still unknown. Actually the development work was to start from April 1, 1966 but no form of development could be witnessed at the ground level in Sikkim. Even after 6 months, the public had not witnessed any form of development and were kept in the dark.

Afnu Kura (Editorial) pointed out the errors in the voters list. The list was in English; it was out from a duplicating machine in a duplicated paper. This made it complicated to read for not just the voters but also the panchayat and village men. People who knew English were hunted down to read it for the general people. If it was written in Nepali, many people would have managed to read it.

### III. Conclusion

*Kanchenjunga* has undoubtedly been the most important publication in the sense it gave an idea to Sikkim people how and in what media can help people and shape up public opinion. It sowed the seeds for the formation of public sphere in Sikkim. It started attempting at creation of democratic consciousness during the era of monarchy which was highly exemplary. It has been known for fearless journalism, though political in the beginning, it always had other reports to educate the people of Sikkim. *Kanchenjunga* has definitely done a marvellous job of kick starting journalism in Sikkim. The opinions written in the paper seemed to have influenced the public opinion and may have changed the course of history in Sikkim.

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