Dedicated to all, who have experienced, being 'the other'

Declaration

I hereby declare that the thesis titled "Media Polarisation and the Assertion of Ethno-Religious Identities in the English Print Media of North East India" submitted to School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Tezpur University in part fulfilment for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Mass Communication and Journalism is true to the best of my knowledge. This is an original work of research was carried out by me and was not submitted for any research degree in any other university/institute.

Date: 29.12.2023

Subhajet Paul

(Subhajit Paul)

Place: Tezpur



Tezpur University Department of Mass Communication and Journalism

Tezpur, Napaam – 784028

Certificate

This is to certify that the thesis titled Media Polarisation and the Assertion of Ethno-Religious Identities in the English Print Media of North-East India submitted to School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Tezpur University in part fulfilment for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Mass Communication and Journalism is a record of original research work carried out by Mr. Subhajit Paul under my supervision and guidance.

All help received by him from various sources have been duly acknowledged.

No part of this thesis has been submitted elsewhere for award of any other degree.

Atanna

Date: 29.12.2023 Place: Tezpur Supervisor: Uttam Kr. Pegu, Ph.D. Designation: Associate Professor Department: Mass Communication and Journalism School: Humanities and Social Sciences

Acknowledgements

When I made my decision to pursue a research degree, I had a certain awareness of the commitment that was required but could not comprehend the various difficulties that would ensue in the process of the compilation and completion of the years invested in this research project and this has been very rewarding to say the least. This is a chapter of my life which has its fair share of excitement, failure, boredom, anxiety and most importantly a great deal of learning.

I have met different kinds of people throughout this journey of mine that have enhanced both my academic and life experiences. I have made great friends, supportive colleagues, and resourceful fellow research competitors from not just my department in Tezpur University but the various places that I could access in the course of this research. There was not one instant from which I could not learn something.

I have met some of the kindest people at the Department of Mass Communication and Journalism at Tezpur University. I will fall short of appreciating my experience in the Department if I do not acknowledge that my worldview was challenged in a very positive way and I am extremely grateful for the endless support I received from all the people who have had a role in shaping my thoughts. The list is long and cumbersome and yet I cannot miss out the contribution of any of them.

Firstly, I owe utmost gratitude to my faculty advisor at Pondicherry University, while I was pursuing my Master's degree, Dr. Shuaib Muhammed Haneef. He had supervised my Masters' dissertation and, in the process, inculcated research temperament and curiosity that I carry to this day. At Tezpur University, I must acknowledge the contributions of my supervisor, Prof. Uttam Kumar Pegu, who is currently with Rajiv Gandhi University as Professor in the Department of Mass Communication who has been instrumental in shaping my research. At every stage of my research, he has provided me with moral and academic support to face the challenges that I have had to come across in the Course of this study. My local supervisor, Prof. Abhijit Bora, who is the current head of the Department of Mass Communication and Journalism at Tezpur University, has been a constant source of encouragement throughout my research journey and I am thankful for all the support I have received from him on both professional and personal fronts.

With the crude idea that I had come with to the department, I am very thankful to Prof. Sunil Kanta Behera would put in immense effort to actively listen to problems of all researchers including mine. The commitment of Prof. Behera to field of research, at his age was just remarkable and something that we, the early-stage researchers must learn from. Dr. P. Anbarasan, who was an Associate Professor in the Department of Mass Communication and Journalism at Tezpur University was another such person whom we lost very early. His ethical foundations and professional conduct were aspects that every researcher ought to inculcate. He would, from time to time, patiently listen to various problems in my research and make sensible contributions wherever there was scope for improvement. Prof. Behera and Dr. Anbarasan are no longer with us but their teachings live with us.

I would also like to place, on record, my gratitude to Prof. Joya Chakrabarty who helped me streamline my research questions and has made numerous contributions to my study. I also thank all other faculty members in the Department of Mass Communication and Journalism at Tezpur University who have made contributions to my research.

I also thank some of my friends who have made major contributions to my research by supporting my overall holistic growth in developing a research temperament. Here I would like to mention the name of Mr. Anup Kumar Sinha, it was in a discussion with him that the idea of my research was conceived. Dr. Kuldeep Siwach, is another name that cannot be missed here, who was my colleague at Lovely Professional University and had taught me a lot about research methodology, during our evening walks.

Furthermore, I would like to also thank my fellow research scholars in my department and other departments for their empathetic considerations and encouragement in the various stages of my study. I would like to, here, specially mention Vansanglura, Richa Chattapadhyay, Bibal Joy Reang, Shivam Kakoti, Saket Kumar Bhardwaj, Debashish Pratim Sarma who were directly involved in nourishing the quality of my research in more ways than one. They were my support system during my research journey from whom I have learned so many things.

I would also like to thank the university administration and our hostel staff who were very helpful in providing the infrastructure to pursue my research goals seamlessly. I am extremely grateful to our cooks in the mess who work tirelessly every day for the timely service of food to the boarders and the cleaning staff who keep our hostel premises clean and hygienic. One might not realise but their effort reduces ours, giving us more time to invest in our work. As a recipient of funds from the University Grants commission, I would also like to thank them. The funds were essential for accomplishing the objectives of my research.

Last but not the least, I would also like to thank my family members who have been patiently and constantly supporting me so that I am able to accomplish my goals. I am extremely thankful to my father, who I lost recently. He had been a source of constant encouragement and had my best interests in mind. He is greatly missed. I would also like to thank my mother who consistently encouraging me to pursue my goals.

Tables and Figures

Figure 1: Journalists Killed in India from 1992-2023
Figure 2: India's Ranking on the World Press Freedom Index Report 2002-2023
Figure 3: van Dijk's Ideological Square
Figure 4: Lok Sabha Elections, 1952-2019, Seats and Percentage of Votes
Figure 5: State-wise ownership of newspapers (Press in India Report 2020-21) 50
Figure 6: Total number of registered publications in North East India 50
Figure 7: Average circulation of registered publications (English & Language Press) 58
Figure 8: Registered Publications in Assam
Figure 9: Circulation Figures for registered English Publications in Assam
Figure 10: Representation of actors in The Assam Tribune during 2019 elections
Figure 11: Map of Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council
Figure 12: Registered Publications in Tripura
Figure 13: Circulation Figures for Registered English Publications in Tripura
Figure 14: Representation of actors in Tripura Times during 2019 elections
Figure 15: Registered publications in Sikkim 107
Figure 16: Representation of actors in Sikkim Express
Figure 17: The Change in Population from 1971 to 1991 in Meghalaya 121
Figure 18: Percentage Change in the Population from 1971 to 1991 in Meghalaya 121
Figure 19: Registered Publications in Meghalaya 128
Figure 20: Circulation Figures for Registered English Publications in Meghalaya 129
Figure 21: Representation of actors in The Shillong Times during 2019 elections 130
Figure 22: Program Schedule of the Special Program of Prayer
Figure 23: Composite Analysis of the Sources of News
Figure 24: Gender Distribution i
Figure 25: State of Residence i
Figure 26: Professions to which the respondents identifiedii
Figure 27: Educational Qualificationii
Figure 28: The most reliable sources of Newsiii

Figure 29: Newspaper readership Data	iii
Figure 30: Preferred Language	iii
Figure 31: Voting Percentage among Sample Population	iv
Figure 32: Perceptions on the use of religion by politicians during elections	iv
Figure 33: Representation of Minority Opinions in Media Discourse	v
Figure 34: Perception on the authenticity of news reports	vi
Figure 35: Polarisation of Public Discourse	vii
Figure 36: Perceptions on the Proliferation of Majoritarian Discourses in the Media	viii