

***Chapter Four***  
***Research Methodology***

## **Research Methodology**

Research methodology is a set of practices, principles, and procedures for obtaining knowledge about the world (Gallagher, 2009, p. 66). The researcher has adopted mixed methodology in order to explore the research problem under investigation. The research problem, described in the study, is situated in a multidisciplinary complex situational setting. The research methodology, therefore, found most suitable for this investigation was mixed methodology as it combines both qualitative and quantitative techniques, which is essential to answer the research questions that have been outlined in the study.

As described in Teddlie & Tashakkori (2009, pp. 11-12), mixed methods in research have been labelled as a third path, paradigm or methodological movement that exists as “...an alternative to the dichotomy of qualitative and quantitative traditions.” They further assert that the research endeavours of social and behavioural scientists endure in the trichotomy of quantitative: oriented towards analysing and understanding numeric data, qualitative: oriented towards analysing and understanding narratives or narrative data and mixed method: oriented towards analysing and understanding both narrative and numeric data. The application of mixed methodology, for this research, has been done to obtain a comprehensive picture of the research problem in consideration. The subsequent sections will describe the collection of data, the research setting where the data has been collected followed by the various methods that have been employed to add perspective to the data collected from the research setting, these include, content analysis, survey, and in-depth interviews, under the overarching umbrella of mixed methodology.

### **4.1. Data Collection**

The study makes use of both primary and secondary data. Primary data is original, given that they are collected afresh and secondary data are those that are compiled from data that are already collected by someone else (Kothari, 2004, p. 95). This study makes use of both primary and secondary data to answer the research questions that have been taken up for the study. Further, the determination of the samples for the collection of primary data also makes use of already existing secondary data, The Press in India Report from 2017 to 2021, at various stages in the course of this study. Other secondary sources of data like the Press Freedom Index published by Reporters Sans Frontiers for the years 2017 to 2022 have also been used.

The researcher has also collected secondary data, in the form of policy documents and relevant gazette notified legal frameworks, from multiple sources that are geographically located in the Northeast of India - the four states that were selected are Assam, Tripura, Meghalaya, and Sikkim, which is the research area for the study as the researcher aims to look at the phenomenon of media polarisation and the assertion of ethno-religious identities through English print media in North East India. The criteria for the selection of the respective states have been provided in the subsequent sections.

The qualitative data has been collected using in-depth interviews of journalists and academicians, who are employed at public universities, in the research area that has been selected for the study. The researcher has also looked at the political news content of selected newspapers in Assam, Tripura, Meghalaya, and Sikkim, which are states that are constituents of the political grouping viz. Northeast. This study makes an effort to analyse the print media content so as to be able to assess the sourcing of the news through the representation of various actors who are either part of the ruling party or the party in opposition, or the individuals allied to either, in the media reportage. In-depth interviews of academicians and journalists have also been conducted to answer the research questions about media polarisation and the ethno-religious identities in the media discourse. A survey was also conducted among youth who are students of Mass Communication and Journalism, Political Science and allied streams who are enrolled in public universities. The criteria for the selection of the interviewees for in-depth interviews, the newspapers for the analysis of the content and the students for the survey have been discussed in subsequent sections. The researcher has tried to bring together the data from various sources in order to lend credibility to the findings that have been outlined in the relevant sections dealing with the respective states selected for the study.

#### **4.2. Research Setting**

The research setting considered for the study were four states in the Northeastern part of India namely, Assam, Tripura, Sikkim, and Meghalaya. The researcher made an informed choice to exclude the other states owing to the paucities enforced primarily by time and resources but justifications for the exclusions have been discussed in subsequent sections. However, the researcher would like to maintain that the inclusion would have made the study more comprehensive and as such this is a delimitation of this study - the states that were excluded were Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Mizoram, and Manipur. An important factor

that impeded on the collection of data from the excluded states include the need for an inner line permit<sup>19</sup> to access the respective states which became tougher during and after the Covid19 pandemic. The Northeastern region, which is the area proposed for the study has not been substantially explored and hence the researcher intended to make an effort to conduct the same. Hence, since the selection of the states was done keeping in mind certain purposes that entail the need for this investigation, the selection of the states was purposive.

Through the analysis of the sources that have been quoted in the print media viz. the respective newspapers selected for the study, this investigation intends to look at the representation of various opinions – the party that is in power and that in opposition; along with the individuals, having political affiliations, allied to either; in the English print media of select states of the Northeast of India, Assam, Meghalaya, Sikkim, and Tripura. As this thesis aims to understand the polarisation of the media, there are specific reasons for the selection of the respective states for the study. These have been described in the paragraphs that follow.

The states that have been selected for this study have the highest number of publications that have been accounted for by the Press in India Report (2020-21) published by the Registrar of Newspapers for India, henceforth RNI. With reference to the states of Meghalaya and Manipur, while both have equal number of total publications, Meghalaya has more publications that are owned by individuals, hence more susceptible to various influences outlined in the ideas under the propaganda filters of Herman and Chomsky (1994, pp. 1-35), in comparison to that in Manipur. Since the Press in India Report accounts for a greater number of publications in the respective states, it is indicative of a more established print media in the respective states. A representation of the data, illustrated by the researcher is indicated as under,

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<sup>19</sup> It is an official document issued by a concerned state government within India that allows travel in or within the state or in areas that are deemed as protected areas.

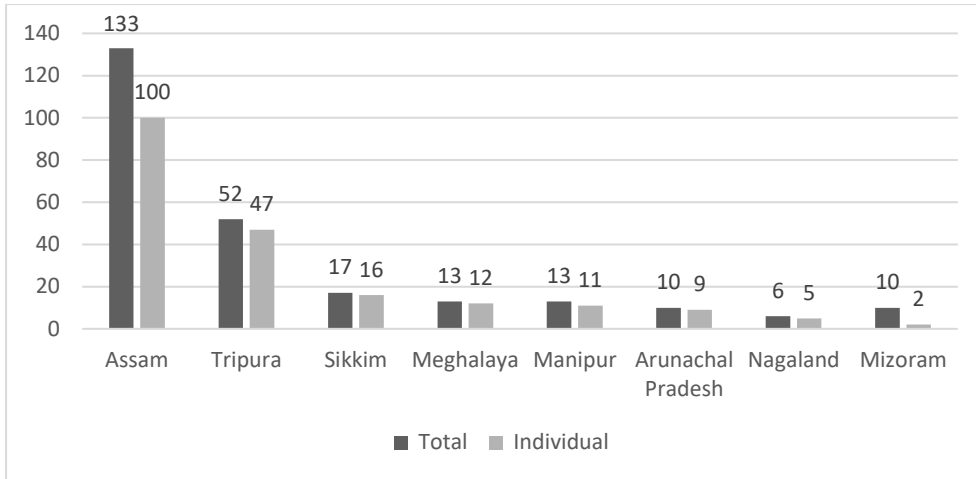


Figure 5: State-wise ownership of newspapers (Press in India Report 2020-21)

Source: Data from RNI, illustrated by researcher

The researcher did not consider the total number of registered publications in the respective states because it fails to indicate if the publications are active. There is an assumption that has been made here, that, if the publication has filed its circulation data to the RNI, the respective publication is active. Hence the data for the publications that have filed their annual statements to the RNI, has been taken into consideration. For reference, the data for the total number of registered publications has been compiled into an illustration as under.

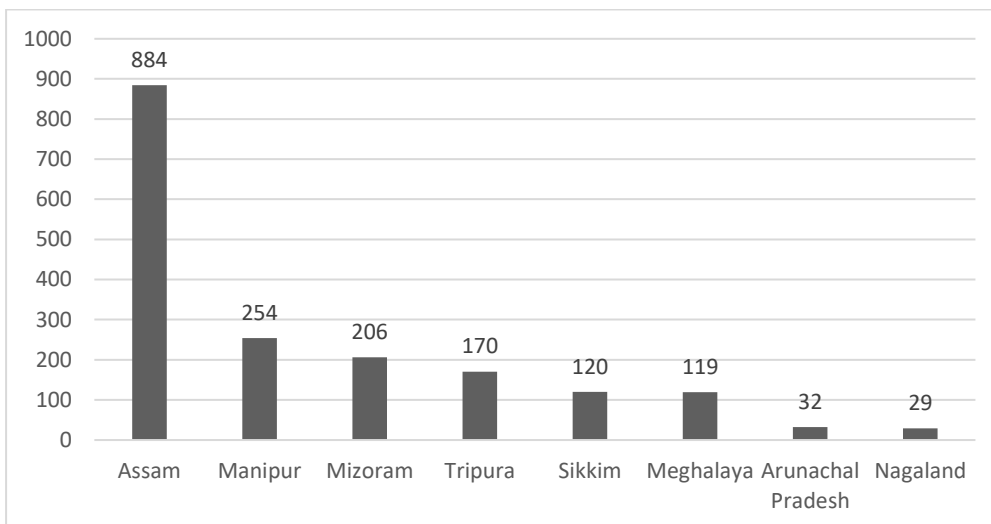


Figure 6: Total number of registered publications in North East India

Source: Data from RNI, illustrated by researcher

The four states that have been selected for the study, in two states viz. Assam and Tripura, a national party viz. the Bhartiya Janata Party, is the single largest party in the ruling

coalition. In the other two states viz. Sikkim and Meghalaya, regional parties are the largest parties in the ruling coalition, nonetheless, in both cases they are part of an alliance, Northeast Democratic Alliance (NEDA), in which the BJP has a predominant role (Gogoi, 2019). All the eight North Eastern states had the BJP as either the largest party in the ruling coalition (Assam, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur) or part of the ruling coalition being led by a regional party (Meghalaya, Sikkim, Mizoram, Nagaland), until recently in November 2023, when Mizoram, in the elections to the 40 seats in its Legislative Assembly elected a party, not allied to or in coalition with, any of the national parties: BJP or INC, the ZPM<sup>20</sup>. This provides for scope of a comparative analysis, which the researcher has also attempted in the chapter on the discussions on the findings of this study.

Thirdly, Assam, Tripura, Meghalaya, and Sikkim were selected based on the varied religious demography of the respective states. While Assam is a Hindu majority state with 61.47% of the total population, Tripura is 83.40% Hindu, Meghalaya which is 74.59% Christian and Sikkim which is 57.76% Hindu majority but has a considerable Buddhist population standing at 27.39% (Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, 2011). The case of Sikkim is unique because the Legislative Assembly in Sikkim has a seat which is reserved for an individual of the Buddhist Sangha<sup>21</sup> (Office of the Chief Electoral Officer, 2023), as per provisions of Article 371F<sup>22</sup> of the Constitution of India, indicating linkages between the polity and religious institutional set-ups.

For the state of Assam, survey data was collected from Tezpur University and Guwahati University. In Assam, interviews with academicians were mostly conducted with faculty in Guwahati University with one at Tezpur University. Interviews with journalists and editors were conducted among them, who were based out of Guwahati<sup>23</sup>. For the state of Meghalaya, survey data was collected from North Eastern Hill University in Shillong<sup>24</sup>. In Meghalaya, interviews with academicians were conducted with faculty at North Eastern Hill University and English and Foreign Languages University (Shillong Campus). Journalists and editors, based out of Shillong, were interviewed for the study.

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<sup>20</sup> ZPM, Zoram People's Movement, is a regional party in the state of Mizoram in India.

<sup>21</sup> An assembly constituency in Sikkim that does not have any geographical boundary and is a seat reserved for the monastic community.

<sup>22</sup> Special set of laws, specific to the state of Sikkim that are provided by the Constitution of India and a result of agreements made during the merger of Sikkim to India in 1972.

<sup>23</sup> A major city in the state of Assam, India.

<sup>24</sup> Capital city of the state of Meghalaya, India.

In Sikkim, survey data was collected from Central University of Sikkim. The interviews with academicians were conducted with faculty in Central University of Sikkim. Interviews with journalists and editors were conducted with them, who were based out of Gangtok<sup>25</sup>. In Tripura, survey data was collected from Tripura University. The interviews with academicians were conducted with faculty at Tripura University and the interviews with journalists and editors were conducted with them, who are based out of Agartala<sup>26</sup>. Except for Guwahati, the capital cities, in the mentioned states were selected because the offices of the various media houses were predominantly located in the respective cities. Guwahati is the biggest city in Assam and Dispur, its capital is located within it, hence its selection.

### **4.3. Content Analysis**

On the method of content analysis, Krippendorff (2019, p. 24) states – “... content analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use.” Berelson (1952, p. 18) as cited in Krippendorff (2019, p. 25) in the context of communication research, had defined content analysis as “...A research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication”.

Popp (2006, p. 6), through an example of another study, conducted by the Glasgow University Media Group, on the transformation of events and social conditions to broadcast news talk, describes how, “media language choice is an institutionalized means of framing reality”. Shojaei & Laheghi (2012), adding to this assert that the framing of social, political, cultural, economic, and ideological realities also depends on the language use of the mass media, particularly printed news media. Kuo & Nakamura (2005) & Wang (2009), in this regard, have also noted that that media content is reflective of society and conveys ‘the dominant elite ideologies’ of a social community. While this study has not made a thematic analysis of the content, it has indeed made an effort to analyse the sources that have been quoted in the process of gathering and dissemination of news in the print media of the states selected for the study. Through corroboration of the same with the in-depth interviews, the researcher has tried to analyse the dominant representations, in the form of the manifestation of their ideas through the quotes. The analysis of the content of the newspapers, was therefore, able to determine the dominant views in the selected newspapers in the research

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<sup>25</sup> Capital city of the state of Sikkim, India.

<sup>26</sup> Capital city of the state of Tripura, Agartala.

setting, for the study. Goffman (1981) as cited in Fairclough (2003), in the context of text, makes a clear distinction between an ‘author’ and an ‘animator.’ He notes, “... the ‘author,’ the one who puts the words together and is responsible for the wording, and the ‘animator,’ the person who makes the sounds or the marks on paper.” (p. 12).

In the case of a news report though, Fairclough (2003, p. 12), articulates, “... a news report may be authored by a journalist while the principal may be some politician, for instance, whose position is being implicitly supported.” In other words, here, the journalist becomes the ‘animator’ and the politician, the ‘author’ without authoring the news report. Further, textual analysis, by itself, has its own limitations but in conjunction with other methods, it has the capability to enhance social research. Fairclough (2003), in this regard, notes,

“... one needs to look at interpretations of texts as well as texts themselves, and more generally how texts practically figure in particular areas of social life, which suggests that textual analysis is best framed within ethnography (or other methods)” (p. 15)

The researcher has limited the content analysis to the analysis of the quotations from different source(s) whose views have been quoted directly or indirectly within the news reports of the political beat<sup>27</sup>, that were published in the newspapers, across the four states selected for the study. The selection of the news reports was done purposively in line with the research questions that this study intended to address. The quotations were analysed based on a framework that was developed based on Fairclough’s (2015) intertextual analysis and Dijk’s (2008) ideological square, as described in section 1.5 Theoretical Frameworks for the Study; outlines an effective technique to determine the emphasis that has been laid to the opinions of respective stakeholders in the conversation, through an analysis of the frequency of the various sources quoted in the news reports. Additionally, the more the number of direct quotations in the news report: lesser the scope for distortion of the opinion that are expressed. On the other hand, when a quotation is paraphrased viz. indirect quotation: increased scope for the biases of the author in the news report.

For this study the researcher had selected one newspaper from each of the four states that are part of the research setting. The quotations were collected from news related to politics

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<sup>27</sup> It is a genre of news reports characterised by reportage on the happenings in the polity of the entity under consideration.



on the first page of the respective newspapers during the time of the elections, this included a total of hundred days inclusive of the election dates, a month prior to the elections and a month after it. The sources of a total of 1158 quotations were eventually analysed. While the entire exercise was conducted by the researcher himself, Holsti's method was used on a section of the corpus of data; total 132 quotations viz. approximately 11%, spread over a period of 5 days at different intervals in the hundred-day analysis period; to check for inter-coder reliability and rule out biases in the coding of the data. As cited in Mao (2017, p. 741) the Holsti's formula to measure intercoder reliability is:  $\text{Inter-coder reliability} = \frac{2 * M}{(N1 + N2)}$ ; where, M is the total number of decisions that the two coders agree on; N1 and N2 are the numbers of decisions made by Coder 1; in this case the researcher; and Coder 2 respectively. The result of the test;  $\frac{2 * 126}{264} = 0.9545$ ; yielded an acceptable 95.45% reliability.

As far as the selection of newspapers is concerned, the basis was circulation data from the Press in India (Registrar of Newspapers for India, 2020-21) report but as was observed during the study, in a few states the data was unreliable. This forced the researcher to consult experts in the region about the predominant newspapers of the English language, in the respective states. The researcher also collected policy documents that outlined regulations for advertising in the respective states which also included, the fixed rates for advertising paid by the state government(s) in Assam, Meghalaya, Sikkim and Tripura by visiting the respective Departments in-charge of disbursing and making payments for advertisements. There was also another policy document, published by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, on the fixed official rates paid by the various agencies of the Government of India to various newspapers in the respective states; which was consulted to select the newspapers; that was evaluated for the analysis of the sources that were quoted in them. The selected newspapers are; for Assam: The Assam Tribune; for Meghalaya: The Shillong Times; for Sikkim: Sikkim Express; and for Tripura: Tripura Times. A brief description about the newspapers that have been selected for the study have been described under.

In the state of Assam, although the Press in India Report (2020-2021) mentions that the Sentinel has the highest circulation, the advertisement rates that is paid by the Government of Assam, to The Assam Tribune is higher, which points to higher importance accorded to

the newspaper with reference to the role the newspaper plays managing the agenda setting<sup>28</sup> process in the state. The same is true for the advertising rates paid by the various agencies of the Government of India to the Assam Tribune, which is among the highest for English newspapers in Assam, also higher than the Sentinel.

While this was a conjecture that the researcher had made in the initial days of undertaking this investigation, confirmations about the same were also obtained from consultations with experts of the respective area in the state of Assam. The data provided through the Press in India report was in fact a matter of concern among the experts who were consulted. In fact, the researcher could assess a flaw in the process of the filing of reports by respective newspapers to the RNI, in the states under consideration. This had resulted in at least two occasions where a flaw in the process was evident viz. the case of The Sentinel in Assam and Taseer, an Urdu daily, in Sikkim, in previous editions of the Press in India report, not matching with the information shared by the experts and the data that was available from other government bodies. This is also a secondary finding from this study and while the objects of this anomaly have not been meticulously explored, the researcher is convinced that an exploration of the same would have greater policy implications.

In Tripura, the newspaper that was analysed for this study was Tripura Times. It is positioned in category 'B,' in terms of the fixed rate paid for advertising on the paper by the Government of Tripura. The Department of Information and Cultural Affairs, Government of Tripura is responsible for maintaining these rates, that have been categorised under these multiple categories. The rates paid for advertising on the Tripura Times is among the highest for newspapers published in English. This is the true, even for the rates that are paid by the various agencies of the Government of India, as per advertising rates published by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, enclosed in the annexures of this thesis. While Tripura Times and Tripura Observer are paid the highest rates, Tripura Times is the older paper and hence is predominant in the agenda setting process.

In Sikkim, the newspaper that was selected for this study was Sikkim Express, edited by Amit Patro. As per the advertising policy of the Government of Sikkim; as notified in Gazette notification no. 239, published on 11<sup>th</sup> October, 2006 from Gangtok and procured

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<sup>28</sup> Agenda setting is a theory in the study of communication that entails that the communication media plays crucial role in the selection of news which they think should be attended to by policy makers and in doing so also shape public opinion on the specific issue.

by the researcher from the office of the Information and Public Relations Department, Government of Sikkim; a flat rate is paid for advertising in the newspapers having a circulation in Sikkim. There is no categorisation of the newspapers on the basis of circulation. The decision of the researcher to select Sikkim Express, was therefore based on The Press in India (Registrar of Newspapers for India, 2020-21, p. 561) report and the same was corroborated with corresponding rates paid by the agencies of the Government of India through the Directorate of Advertising and Visual Publicity; the nodal agency assigned for the task at the time; as per the advertising rates set by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India.

In Meghalaya, the newspaper that was analysed for this study was The Shillong Times. The proprietor and former editor of the newspaper, Manas Chaudhuri and the current editor, Ms. Patricia Mukhim are both Padmashri<sup>29</sup> awardees for their contributions to the field of Journalism. As per the advertising policy of the Government of Meghalaya, maintained by the Directorate of Information and Public Relations in Meghalaya, flat rates are paid for the issuance of advertisements to newspapers, hence there is no clear indication of a categorisation of the newspapers. Likewise, the Press in India (Registrar of Newspapers for India, 2020-21) report, which only enlists the highest circulated newspaper in Meghalaya has listed 'Mawphor', a Khasi language daily as the highest circulated newspaper but this did not serve the purpose of the researcher in the selection of a quality newspaper published in the English language, hence data published by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, came of use here; the Government of India pays The Shillong Times, among the highest rates for advertising on the paper but there are also other papers that are paid the same rate, most prominently Meghalaya Times edited by Thomas Lim. In this regard, the selection of The Shillong Times was determined in consultation with experts in the area which included researchers as well as field experts. The fact that the 'The Shillong Times' has two 'Padma Shri' awardees associated with the organisation; also contributed to the selection of the paper for analysis. The Shillong Times is among the oldest English dailies in the state of Meghalaya, being published since 1945.

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<sup>29</sup> The Padma Shri is one of the Padma Awards instituted by the Government of India in the year 1954, is announced every year on 26<sup>th</sup> January, the 'Republic Day' of India. It is awarded for distinguished service in all fields of activities or disciplines where an element of public service is involved. (Government of India, 2022)

All the relevant policy documents that were used in the decision-making process, from the states where the study was conducted have been enclosed in the annexures of this thesis. Throughout, the underlying logic behind the selection of the newspapers was: the higher the rate allocated for the advertising in the respective newspaper, the higher the quality of the newspaper. The investigation, while being limited to the analysis of the English press; the researcher considers this a delimitation of the study; did manage to document the happenings in the print media with the highest average circulation, in terms of a particular language. While publications in different languages, singularly, might have had a higher circulation in the respective states, on an average it is the English press that has the highest penetration as is indicated from the circulation data. The case of Meghalaya is unique as the 'others' category in terms language is not confined to one major language, with distinct languages being spoken in different parts of the state, which are at relative par with each other, with no common language for the entire state. The visual representation; Figure 7: Average circulation of registered publications; illustrated using data from RNI's (2020-21) Press in India report, indicates the prominence of the English Press in the Northeast; is therefore a minor finding of this study but since it is based on a single data source, further vetting with the help of other sources of data is a proposed future area of exploration.

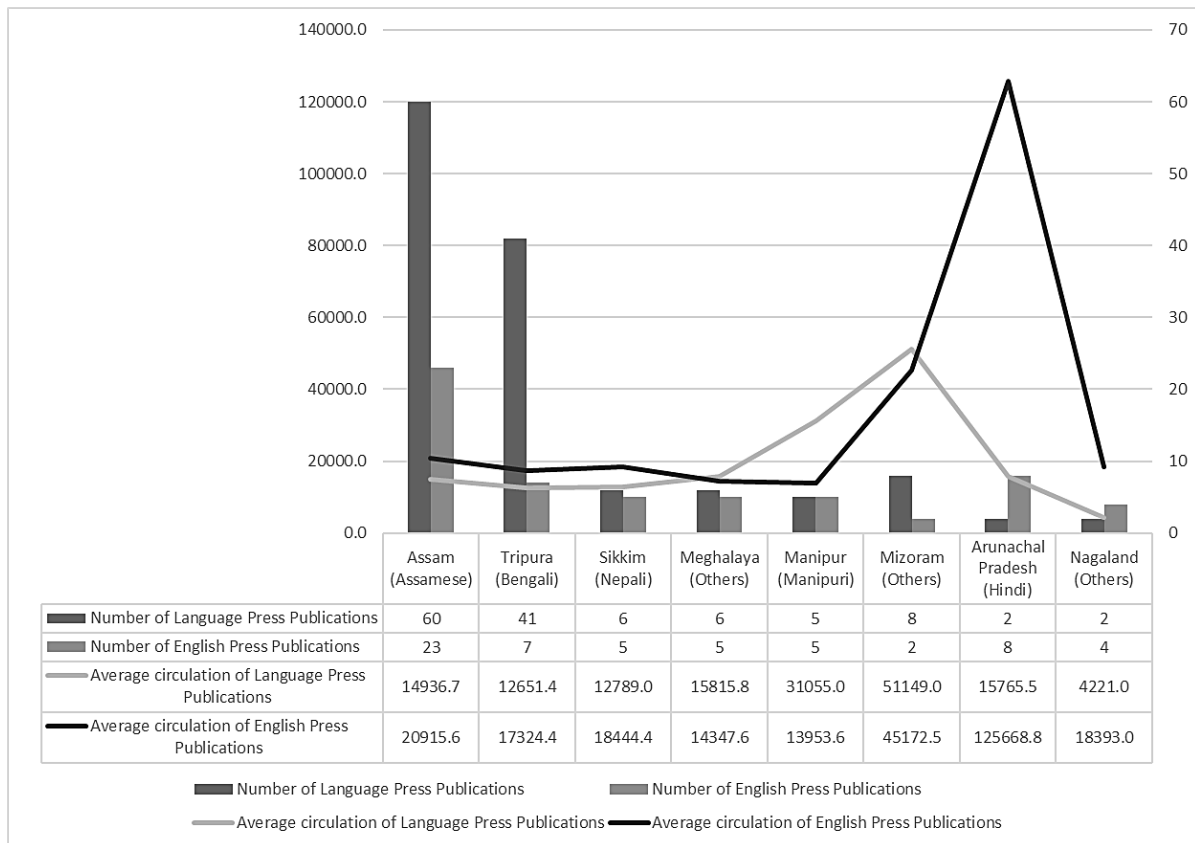


Figure 7: Average circulation of registered publications (English & Language Press)

Source: Data from RNI, illustrated by researcher.

The corpora of data collected from the newspapers have been into perspective using van Dijk’s Ideological Square (1998) and Fairclough’s (2015) ideas on the use of language for the assertion of power relations in society. As such, the two groups that have been formulated, in the context of this study are: (1) ‘the ruling party actors’ which include the Bhartiya Janata Party and its allies; (2) ‘the opposition party actors’ which includes the various parties that are in opposition to the Bhartiya Janata Party at the Centre and the respective state governments. The ‘Us’ in this case are the actors representing the ruling party. ‘Them,’ are the actors representing the opposition. The analysis takes a measure of the direct quotes by ruling party actors; the indirect quotes by ruling party actors; the direct quotes by opposition party actors; and the indirect quotes by opposition party actors; thus, through visual representations, tries to document the frequency of representation of the respective actors in the news reports. As a note with reference to the formulation of the groups: direct quotes have less room for manipulation while indirect quotes have the problem of the writers’ (in this case journalists’) interpretation of the message.

#### 4.4. In-depth Interviews

The use of in-depth interviews has been consistently employed by various scholars over the years. It is essentially a data collection technique in qualitative research that involves "... conducting intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, program or situation." (Boyce & Neale, 2006, p. 3). The researcher, owing to the unique, evolving, and emotive circumstances surrounding the issues in the research setting and the nature of the investigation itself had opted for unstructured interviews. The benefit of the same lay in the characterisation of unstructured interviews,

"...(allowing) a flexibility of approach to questioning ... a non-structured interview ... (allows) much greater freedom to ask, in case of need, supplementary questions or at times ... omit certain questions if the situation so requires. ... Unstructured interview, however, happens to be the central technique of collecting information in case of exploratory or formulative research studies." (Kothari, 2004, p. 110)

A total of 31 interviews were conducted across the states viz. Assam, Meghalaya, Sikkim, and Tripura until repetition of information was achieved. The study followed the concept of 'saturation' regarding the size of the sample for the interviews. Flick (2022), on 'saturation' articulated that the concept of saturation does not entail an exhaustion of interviewees who could contribute to the volume of data that has been collected but

"... that further interviews (or data) will not add any substantial knowledge to a theory that has been developed on the basis of the data collected so far. This kind of saturation is not linked to the number of interviews but to the wealth and depth of insights provided by the data collected and analysed." (2022, pp. 113-114)

As the sampling units belonged to the specialised domains with reference to the area of study, the insights received were substantial, and therefore did not warrant the requirement for additional interviews. Of the 33 interviews, 2 interviews were rejected and so, only 31 interviews were codified based on themes that were relevant to the research problem. The selection of the samples was done purposively and snowballing played a very important in the selection of the journalists and academicians who were interviewed for the study. The researcher has primarily interviewed editors of eminent newspapers, presidents of press

clubs as well as political beat journalists, who were considered under the category of ‘Journalists.’ With reference to ‘Academics,’ the researcher limited the interviewees to faculty members, part of public institutions, involved in teaching and research, from the departments of Mass Communication and Journalism as well as Political Science. This was done purposively, again, as the nature of the research problem requires the “... identification and selection of information-rich cases for the most effective use of limited resources” (Patton, 2002, p. 243).

The interview schedule was prepared in consultation with expert researchers in the region who belong to the respective domain. The interview schedules for all the four states were prepared with common elements with reference to the themes that would address the research questions while also keeping in mind the unique nuances of the area being considered for the study. Owing to the sensitivity of the research problem in consideration, some of the interviewees were uncomfortable with the revelation of their names with reference to the statements that they made. Hence, the researcher, in consultation with the research supervisor decided to withhold the names of the interviewees in connection with the quotations, by not attributing the names of the interviewees to the respective opinions expressed, to ensure anonymity.

However, the researcher has mentioned the list of interviewees and their designations in the Annexures of this thesis. The intention behind mentioning the designation of the interviewees was to establish the purpose behind selecting them as interviewees for the in-depth interviews. NVivo<sup>30</sup> was used to organise and codify the qualitative data, thematically, as per the requirements of the research problem and the consequent research questions and objectives. The researcher, in order to provide more clarity into the opinions expressed by the interviewees in the respective states has also made use of relevant quotations to support the arguments made during the analysis of that data in the chapter dedicated to the status of media polarisation and the assertion of ethno-religious identities through English print media in the states selected for the study.

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<sup>30</sup> A software used for the analysis of quantitative data; the organisation and analysis of interview data in the case of this thesis.

#### **4.5. Survey**

While a survey was also conducted to understand the effect of the proliferation of the discourses in the media on the consumers of the English print media at large, the researcher has made limited use of it owing to certain arbitrary trends in the data. As such, the survey findings have only been included in the annexures of this thesis. Survey, being one of the most popular methods for the collection of data, it involves "... common approaches used in social sciences to empirically study the characteristics of sociological and psychological variables" (Roberts, 1999). Since the researcher has no control over the variables and can only report what has happened or is happening (Kothari, 2004, p. 3), it was decided to conduct a survey among informed youth to learn about their opinions on the phenomena under scrutiny, as has been outlined in the research problem.

A schedule has been used as the instrument to conduct a survey to collect data from informed youth, who were students of Political Science, Mass Communication and Journalism, and allied streams pursuing their Masters' degree at public universities in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Sikkim, who are at least in the third semester of their degree. It was necessary to restrict the survey to only third semester and above because the same ensures that the respondents have a minimum level of understanding about the subject at hand to be able to collect data that is relevant for this study. The samples selected for the study mostly fall in the age bracket of 15-29 years with very few in the age bracket between 30-45 years. While the samples who belonged to the age bracket 15-29 years were selected for the analysis, the ones belonging to 30-45 years were rejected. The age brackets were created in line with the National Youth Policy (Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, 2014, p. 9) which defines 'youth' as those aged between 15-29 years. The policy report further states that, as per census of 2011, this is the group of people who constitute 27.5% of India's population, making them an important stakeholder in the democratic process.

The researcher has relied on the purposive sampling technique which as per Creswell & Plano Clark (2011), also cited in Palinkas, et al. (2013), involves the identification and selection of entities (individual or group) who have knowledge of a particular phenomenon. Further, as described earlier, the nature of the research problem requires the selection of information rich sources for effective use of the limited resources (Patton, 2002, p. 243). As such the samples who were surveyed for the study were students who were graduates and pursuing a Masters' degree in the political science and mass communication and journalism,



and allied streams. This was regarded as a minimum level of expertise to select them as samples to gather data for the study. While, pursuing a degree in the mentioned streams at public universities does not ensure expertise in the domain, the respondents, in the respective age bracket, are in fact the best equipped to enhance the quality of the data that was collected to obtain answers to the research questions outlined in this study.

The total number of samples from which data was collected across the four states was,  $S=176$  but 24 samples were rejected, therefore the final sample size used for the analysis was,  $S=152$ . This number has been determined based on Krejcie and Morgan (1970), where, against the value of population  $N=240$ , which was the total number of students in the 3<sup>rd</sup> semester across the four states, at public Universities, would require a sample of 148; the researcher was able to procure data from  $S=152$ . There were limitations regarding other practical considerations, which also include low attendance in the classrooms where the schedule was administered, hence, effort was made to collect data at other places too with assistance from the students; the researcher met during the course of the study.

The schedule for the survey was prepared in consultation with experts who were experienced researchers in the region. There was no pre-existing instrument that could be used because of the nature of the phenomenon that was being scrutinised. As the nature of the research, the timing of it and the area where it is being conducted is novel, there was a need for an entirely new instrument to collect data. The researcher used online survey forms for the collection of data instead of traditional schedules. Although the problem of digital divide<sup>31</sup> does come to mind here but the same could be managed through resources that were made available by the institutions where the respondents were pursuing their degrees. A pilot study was conducted in order to assess the weaknesses of the instrument being applied and necessary modifications were also made before, finally using the instrument for the collection of data. The pilot study was conducted at the institution of affiliation, of the researcher, Tezpur University on a sample of  $n=19$  students who belonged to the Department of Mass Communication and Journalism.  $N=19$  is 12.5% of the total sample of 152, and so it was adept to determine the deficiencies of the instrument which was later modified. The schedule was administered in the presence of the researcher in classrooms where due assistance was provided when the respondents were responding to the questions

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<sup>31</sup> Unequal access to digital technology including smartphones, tablets, laptops, and the internet (Ragnedda & Muschert, 2013).

in the schedule. Descriptive statistics was used for the analysis of the collected data and the same compiled and presented in the relevant section of this thesis.

While the survey was not able to substantiate the findings in relation to the research questions, it served as a means to assess the relevance of this study in the current context. The pilot study became the basis for the selection of English press over the language press in the states selected for the study. A deeper analysis of the survey data could have yielded a better understanding of the spread of the phenomena under scrutiny among a considerable section of the society, who, as opinion leaders, play an important role in shaping the discourse within the respective communities. The researcher has, therefore, decided to include the survey findings as part of the annexure to be able to draw from and provide a lead for future research in the area.

#### **4.6. Positionality and Ethical Considerations**

This study essentially deals with the cyclical pattern of the assertion of various identities and the consequent polarisation in the English print media discourse in Northeast India and vice versa. The nature of the study is such that the critical reflections on the part of the researcher, which, although there has been consistent effort to mitigate through thorough evaluation and re-evaluation of the inferences, in light of the explored literature, might have inadvertent personal biases. It is only obvious that the understanding of identity and the extent of its assertion is a subjective concern, the perception of the extent of polarisation, similarly, will also differ based on various factors that could usually, but not limited to, include one's political leaning, one's cultural conditioning and among other factors that might be ascribed in nature. Given such complexities, the researcher wishes to declare that such elements; which are inherent to his existence and of his personal upbringing; might have a bearing on the inferences that have been drawn in the course of conducting this study. While this entire thesis has been written in third person, the researcher therefore deems it adept that such a reflection on oneself be done in the first person.

“ In the description of my identity, I think, to categorise the elements of it as ‘ascribed’ and ‘achieved’ would be the most appropriate as it is the same framework that has aided in my attempt to put the findings of this study into perspective. In this effort to ‘square the circle’ in which I am situated, I draw on Bauman (2004, p. 10) and as such the various, ascribed and achieved, elements of my identity include: I am an ethnic Sylheti with ancestral origins from the Barak Valley in Assam. While, people of Sylheti origin generally identify

themselves as Bengali, my understanding of the Bengali identity is that of a collection of ethnicities and not an ethnicity by itself and as such I am sure of my Sylheti identity but not of my Bengali identity but this is a more recent development after I had the opportunity to explore the research that was being carried out on the origins of the Sylheti culture and language. That said; like the many in my community; for a very long time in my life, I was surer of my Bengali identity with Sylheti being only a footnote in it.

I was born and brought up in Shillong, the capital city of Meghalaya, where I spent my childhood witnessing ‘bandhs’ imposed by various interest groups and curfews imposed by the government to tackle the law-and-order situation which was a result of the racial tensions that ensued between the autochthonous or as was known in common parlance ‘tribals’ and the non-autochthonous rest with consistent systemic violence translating to periodic instances of physical violence. At this time, I was more aware of being a Bengali and not a Sylheti but this violence was directed to all non-autochthonous others, so while this disclosure might seem irrelevant here it has a bearing as I explain my current situation. Growing up in such a situation, it was not an uncommon occurrence to face instances of systemic and physical violence based on the community that was on the receiving end from time to time. As such, this is also evident from the substantial volume of literature that has been generated in this regard and has been highlighted in relevant sections in this thesis. Being on the receiving end of identity assertions, I grew up with a disdain for such assertions with very limited understanding of the need for such assertions.

The rise of the discourse on Hindutva meandering on the lines of an ethno-religious movement with pre-poll campaigns leading up to the election of Narendra Modi in the 2014 general elections, at a time when I was being exposed to scholarship which was more left-leaning in its orientation, infused a critical lens with which I witnessed the rise of Hindutva. I was critical as I could see in it a semblance of the ethnic identity assertions that I had witnessed through my childhood but this was again a momentary addition to my inherent confusion on identity – as, in this case; although I do lean towards atheism; I cannot deny my identification with the Hindu fold, which I have come to know is acceptable within the Hindu cultural identity.

Coming back to my confusion on the need for assertion of identities, here comes my Sylheti identity again. As I have discussed, I see the ethnic Sylheti identity as independent from the Bengali identity with its very own culture and language with its very own script viz. the

Sylheti Nagari script but this is an information that is not common in the Sylheti community – given that their identity has been subsumed by the larger Bengali identity and owing to the lack of any form of assertion, the distinct culture is as endangered as is the script. I would like to disclose here that I cannot speak the Sylheti language myself. Under such circumstances, I am again confused if the assertion of identities is all that bad.

I think in the course of doing this thesis and the scholarship that I have come across, I am closer to an answer: I think identities should be ascribed in nature only to the extent that memberships are open to anyone who is willing to adopt the way of life which is a constituent of that identity. I therefore think identities should be more achievable than ascribed. Identities which are purely ascribed often suffer the fate of being parochial and consequently act as a means for the ‘othering’ of all who do not possess the traits of being part of that identity.

My problem, as far as my limited understanding makes me capable of comprehending, is not with the assertions of identity but with the othering that ensues, sometimes, as a result of it. This, in essence, is my position on identity at the time of the completion of this thesis and as has my position evolved through various experiences, I understand that it will keep evolving throughout my life. Being a fan of Hegelian thought, I would like to think that, this is one such dialectic which is and will be part of my living experience.

#### **4.7. Summarising Comments**

This chapter has described the research methodology that has been employed to examine the research problem at hand. The sections have made an effort to outline, the methods of data collection, a description on the research setting, and the methods employed in the analysis of the data collected; along with how they have been presented. This was followed by a declaration of the ethical considerations and positionality of the researcher which has a bearing on the inferences of this study. The next chapter in the thesis, is an account of the findings from the field; with relevant theoretical and conceptual underpinnings to contextualise them; that have been a result of the application of the methodology described in the current chapter.