

CHAPTER-II

Review of Literature

The present study attempts to look at and understand the origin and emergence of Assamese news media in relation to its socio-historical backdrop and context, and as such tries to correlate the developments in a contextual manner. Accordingly, the review of literature conducted for the study on books, book chapters, edited volumes, journal articles, government reports etc. have tried to look for relevant information and perspectives concerning the background and development of the Assamese news media, communication arts, social and cultural history. Additionally, key works of political theory and media studies of relevance to the current study were also consulted which are mentioned below as per the thrust dimensions or areas.

2.1. Studies on the history and development of the Assamese press

A major part of the exercise reviews the literature on the period of the early development of Assamese newspapers and periodicals. As far as the history and growth of press in Assam is concerned there is one volume which is more or less comprehensive in terms of information and viewpoints, is *150 Years of Journalism in Assam* edited by Gobinda Prasad Sarma (Sarma et al. 2007, 10-80) It contains an all total of 42 essays which throws light on the history, growth and contribution of newspapers and magazines to Assamese society at large. The original Assamese version of the book (Saikia et al. 1998) though, have proved to be more useful since some of the articles authored by different writers were trimmed for the English version. Accordingly, this research, where more appropriate parts of perspectives in the book were originally composed in Assamese have been translated by the researcher for the purpose of clarity and precision.

It seems, the completion of hundred and fifty years of the birth of the Assamese press in the year 1996 occasioned couple of other studies on the history of the Assamese press. They were not edited volumes, and attempted more connected accounts of the development of Assamese newspapers and literary magazines from its inception to the middle of the twentieth century. One of the studies was conducted by Profulla Chandra Borua, who was a veteran journalist and editor in the world of the Assamese newspapers. The book titled *A Short History of Assamese Newspapers* (Borua et al. 1997) looks at the

development of Assamese press chronologically from *Orunodoi* in the mid nineteenth century to the publication of the noted Assamese paper *Janambhumi* in 1947. The study is a systematic narrative account of the Assamese newspapers and assembles important data on the name of the newspapers, proprietors, editors, journalists and news quality of the Assamese press. However, the study does not cover the emergence of the English language press of the state of Assam, and the other characteristic print media of magazines and journals, which was influential in shaping Assamese literature and culture of the modern era. The other study concerned here, *Press in Assam: Origin and Development* (Baruah et al. 1999) written by historian Sunil Pawan Baruah fills this gap and is a precise and neat look on the emergence and growth of press in Assam in a more holistic manner as the study contextualizes the main theme and subject. Each of the chapters of the book throw interesting light on the publication of newspapers, magazines and periodicals of Assam from 1846 to 1947. More importantly it makes an analytical interpretation on the role of press in the formation of Assamese nationalism, intelligentsia and of the character of journalism in Assam in the period concerned.

A book length study titled *Orunodoi* (Chowdhury et al. 1995), authored by noted Assamese writer Prasenjit Chowdhury provides detailed analysis of the context, emergence and development of the first Assamese newspaper. It proved to be a useful guide to the present study as it steered clear of a glorified approach to the role of the American Baptists and their monthly paper in Assamese life and instead attempts to look at the phenomenon in an objective critical fashion. Combining a study of the nature and objectives of the Assam Mission of the American Baptists with analysis of news items or stories published in *Orunodoi*, Chowdhury's study brings out a nuanced picture of the role of the celebrated paper in a unique fashion.

2.2. Studies on issues and challenges of Assamese news media by journalists

Studies on the prevailing issues and challenges of Assamese press and other news media by journalists have a valuable place in the current study as they throw light on the intricacies of the developments from an insider's perspective.

In this regard, the few books reviewed are collections of articles and essays by noted Assamese journalists of yester years and the present era. Late Radhika Mohan Bhagavati, who is known as one of the noted editors of modern Assamese journalism has written two

anthologies of essays on the Assamese media. The first book written in Assamese on different aspects of Assamese journalism is entitled *Sambad Sambadpatra Aru Sambandikata* (Bhagavati et al. 2005) is a useful collection of short essays as it provides insights from a practicing journalist with over 50 years of experience. Collectively, the essays bring to the reader's notice the growth, ethics, language and industry dynamics of Assamese press. The other book of Bhagavati titled *Kapling Siga Sambadikata Aru Anyanya* (Bhagavati et al.2007) is a similarly designed collection of articles which highlights different aspects at play in the world of the Assamese newspapers, its newsroom dynamics, journalists' ethics, media and politics etc.

Atanu Bhuyan is a noted contemporary journalist, having worked in both Assamese language print and television news space of the state since 1990s. He has written two accounts of his personal experiences in the world of Assamese newspapers and television channels. The first of the two accounts is a book titled *Sangbadikatar Akathya* (Bhuyan et al. 2012). It is an insider's account of personal highlights revolving around the interface of media and politics in Assam from the 1990s to the first decade of the 2000s. It specifically documents the nature of the economic and political forces and individuals behind the Assamese press in the form of personal anecdotes. In the process, a grounded personal narrative emerges which is revelatory from the point of view of the complicity of journalists in the wheeling and dealing between political parties, politicians and investors-owners of the local media. Bhuyan's next book *TRP* (Bhuyan et al. 2014), is a collection of diary style anecdotal entries on the issues, pressures, and politics inside the television news business in Assam.

An anecdotal account of the early days of cable television news journalism in Assam, *First In* (Baruah et al. 2010) provides a series of brief commentaries on the vicissitudes of the media scene in Assam of the present times. Authored by noted Guwahati based television journalist, Sudip Prakash Baruah, the book looks at the developments of the early days of local cable television news in Guwahati. In the late 1990s and early 2000s when Prag News was a local cable channel, independent television news (barring public broadcaster Guwahati Doordarshan Kendra's television news bulletins) was broadcast to the viewers for the first time in Assam's media history. The bulletin reached cable television connected homes in and around Guwahati and subsequently was also broadcast on the local cable

networks of other towns in Assam. The book attempts to paint a picture of the media and socio-cultural context of Guwahati in the emergence of the satellite channel *Prag News*.

An essay titled 'Kola dhonere Mantri Sharmar media baron huar swapna' in social activist Akhil Gogoi's book *Gana Sangramor Dinlipi* (Gogoi et al 2011) provides a picture of how a host of hoax companies have funded the Assamese 24x7 news channel *News Live*. People enjoying close bonds with the then leading Congress politician Himanta Biswa Sharma have been shown to be operating on behalf of him in the expensive set-up for the network.

2.3. Studies on the social history and political processes of the state

Studies on the history and political developments of a region makes an invaluable contribution towards studies on emergence and role of mass media in a region as it makes the study grounded in a particular social universe. Any form of mass media does not function in a vacuum, and social histories often makes one aware of the importance of paying attention to the context of media. In the case of the present study, the endeavour has been enriched by the important work of several social scientists on the state of Assam and the region. Since the study also takes into its scope to provide an overview of the different media and communication traditions as sites of information and news before modern print in Assam, such an exercise proved to be useful in gaining an understanding of the lifeworlds of the regions in a historical perspective.

The seminal book, entitled *Planter Raj to Swaraj: Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam* (Guha et al. 1977) provides a detailed critical picture of the key socio-economic and political developments of the region, and as such have provided an important reference for the present study concentrated on the origin and emergence of the Assamese press.

The noted study on the role of non-state literary and cultural organisations in the construction of the Assamese national identity and ethos by academic and intellectual Dr Devabrata Sharma (Sharma et al 2013) is relevant for the present study in many ways. Specially, the coverage on the role of the press in Assam during the period between 1873 and 1960 provided an invaluable source as it examines the nature, ideology and politics of the Assamese newspapers and magazines.

Well-known contemporary political scientist on the region, Sanjib Baruah's study *India Against Itself: Assam & the Politics of Nationality* (Baruah et al. 1999) examines the roots of ethnic conflict, immigration, land and language politics, and the implications subnational cross-currents in the region. For the present research study, the book provided insights towards understanding the contested developments in relation to language and nationality of the region.

Nani Gopal Mahanta's study *Confronting the State: ULFA's Quest for Sovereignty* (Mahanta et al. 2013) analyses the socio-political context of ULFA's rise, fall and sustenance over the decades and indicates that the outfit represents a mindset, albeit suppressed, which is deeply engrained in Assam's collective psyche. The work was useful in understanding the socio-political developments of the state in the 1980s and the 1990s. Of a similar terrain, *Troubled Periphery: Crisis of India's North-East* (Bhaumik et al. 2009) authored by scholar-journalist Subir Bhaumik looks at the issues of ethnicity, language, land, religion and ideology in all the north-eastern states in a socio-historical perspective.

2.4. Histories of Indian media

The origin and development of the press and the media in India is a fascinating story which has attracted considerable scholarly interest. In order to contextualize the development of the Assamese press in light of the growth of the press in India, quite a few notable studies were consulted. One noteworthy aspect found was that the concerned literature pays very limited description and analysis of the press in Assam. However, the literature reviewed provided important insights into the process of introduction of technology of print and the developments of newspapers across India, and provided a conceptual comparative framework for understanding the trajectory of the Assamese press.

The part two of the Report of the Press Commission of India (Natarajan, 1955) provided a descriptive account of the origin and development of Indian journalism since the colonial times to the tumultuous decades of India's freedom movement. Some of the subjects covered in the study included the role of pioneering individuals, institutions, language press, English press and the implications of the different press laws for the media in the country.

S. Natarajan's account (Natarajan et al. 1962) of the history of the press in India is a detailed descriptive narrative of the origin and development of the press as an institution of public life in India. The study provides an in-depth analysis of the of the early challenges the press faced in British India, and critically engages with the processes through which the press emerged as a democratic force in India. The study analyses both press specific issues along with the broader socio-political developments.

Robin Jeffrey's book *India's Newspaper Revolution: Capitalism, Politics and the Indian Language Press* (Jeffrey et al. 2010) is singular in its sweeping breadth and insight into the workings and influence of the language press on the industry and on society at large in the twentieth century. It reports, describes, and analyses changes brought about by improved printing technology, literacy, capitalism and advertising in the language press of India since the late 1970s. It also looks into ownership patterns of newspapers and its implications for news and politics. Developing his thesis on Benedict Anderson's idea of nationalism he interprets the growth of nationalisms in the Indian states partly to the emergence of powerful vernacular newspapers.

Sevanti Ninan's (Ninan et al. 2007) study *Headlines from the Heartland: Reinventing the Hindi Public Sphere* documents the rise of the Hindi press in the eight states of India's Hindi heartland. It is significant since it analyses the press which enjoys the highest number of newspaper readers in India. Interesting insights are provided about the localization process of the Hindi press and the resulting commercial and political implications.

The essay titled 'Communications and Capitalism in India,1750-2010' by Robin Jeffrey from the book *Media and Modernity: Communications, Women, and the State in India*, (Jeffrey, 2010). It examines the forces in the Indian context that led to the introduction of new technologies of media and its significance for society at large. It identifies three periods in India in information transmission: Peasant mode; Print-Elite mode and Mass-Media mode. The other essay from the book consulted is titled 'The Mahatma Didn't Like the Movies & Why It Matters: Indian Broadcasting Policy: 1920s-1990s' examines the ideological and structural foundations of Indian broadcasting policy as it developed through the last century and identifies three sources for the more or less lackadaisical progress of public service broadcasting in India: restrictive policies inherited from a

colonial state, the puritanism of the Gandhian national movement, and fear of inflaming social conflict.

Nalin Mehta's *India on Television: How satellite News Channels Have Changed the Way We Think and Act* chronicles the relatively recent emergence and growth of private satellite news channels in the post-liberalized capitalist India. The book takes into the context in which satellite news television grew and flourished ultimately. In the process it looks into the growth of media capital, broadcast policy issues, role of advertising and TRPs in relation to news broadcasting in India. There is also a separate chapter on the impact of news television on politics and democracy in India which 'argues that the emergence of television news networks has greatly enhanced and strengthened deliberative Indian democracy.' (Mehta, 2008)

Communication scholars Arvind Singhal and Everett Rogers's study focusses on the communication revolution in India of the 1990s when liberalization and de-regulation of the economy provided new opportunities and spaces in the country's media and communication sector. It describes the development of radio and television in India in a historical framework. It takes into account SITE, and early public service broadcasting in India, and concludes by explaining the growth of Doordarshan into a full-scale national network. On the other hand, the study analyses the factors leading to the emergence of cable and satellite television in the sub-continent and its impact on society (Singhal & Rogers, 2001).

2.5. Theoretical moorings and contours

Review of literature on the topic of this study required an analytical and critical framework which sheds light on the media's development and functioning from its socio-historic dimensions and processes. In brief, key concepts and works which have highlighted the institution and place of mass media in the socio-political and cultural processes and contexts have informed the core of this side of the assessment

For a broad theoretical orientation, the noted media scholar Vincent Mosco's *The Political Economy of Communication* (Mosco et al. 1996) is useful as it provides a comprehensive framework and development of political economy of communication as an area of media research and theory. Pradip Ninan Thoams's *Political Economy of Communications in*

India: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly is a critical study of the political economy of communications in India (Ninam et al. 2010). It explores the ways in which contexts, structures, policies and processes at national and international levels shape media structures. Section one of the book is particularly relevant for the present study as it describes the history of political economy of communications in India from the colonial times to the present day.

The Media & Modernity: A Social Theory of the Media, written by John B. Thompson provides a socio-historical perspective on the link between rise of modernity and the growth of mass media. It argues that communication media has transformed the spatial and temporal constituents of social life, creating new forms of action and interaction which are no longer linked to the sharing of a common locale (Thompson et al. 1995).

In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Habermas et al. 1989) German philosopher Jürgen Habermas delineates the emergence of public spheres in Europe after eighteenth century by drawing attention to the role of merchants, capitalists, private citizens, law makers and the press in the construction of a common ideal of an open space for dialogue and deliberation of public issues which has been always challenged and disrupted at different points through ambivalent and contradictory pulls and pressures.

Benedict Anderson's seminal text *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Anderson et al. 1983) provides a framework for the analysis of the relationship between cultural traditions, capitalism, printing technology, newspapers and emergent forms of nationalism in the modern world. The study argues that historical processes in Europe and colonial regions where print products like books and newspapers created 'imagined communities' by forming collective sense of place and time among its readers and thereby lead to modern nationalism which is unlike anything in older human history.

Written by Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* is another key work which proposed the influential 'propaganda model' of media in modern democratic societies and its role in serving the interests of those powerful (Herman and Chomsky et al. 1988). Although the study analyses the basic institutional structures and relationships within which media operate in

the American context, it remains a critical text in understanding modern commercial media as Indian television media adopts and adapts US style programming and ownership concentrations.

Arvind Rajagopal's *Politics after Television: Hindu Nationalism and the Reshaping of the Public in India* is a ground-breaking work which examines the implications of religious programming in the form the Ramayana in the late 1980s India and the resultant complexion Indian politics took irrevocably thereafter (Rajagopal et al. 2001). The study is significant in the light of the present study as it explains the role television could play unwittingly in larger socio-political processes. By extension, this study alerted the present study towards media's effects as a technology of modernity in a traditional society like India. The concept of 'spilt public' was particularly useful in understanding the dynamics between a globalizing media and the contours of the specific socio-political processes in Indian society.

British cultural critic Raymond Williams's study on the different means of mass communications was significant for its historical base and insights. His study, *Television: Technology & Cultural Form*, introduced the idea of flow in relation to the experience and practice of television viewing. Arguing that planned flow is perhaps the defining characteristic of broadcasting", this seminal work also compares the television experience to the effect of miscellany and variety performances in theatre (Williams et al. 1974). Importantly, Williams places television as a technology and form configured by the forces of capitalism.

Media critic Robert W. McChesney's comprehensive study on the political economy of communications offers the enduring issues and complexities on the theoretical approach and framework (McChesney et al. 2010). It looks historically at the formation of the notion 'professional journalism' and its meanings in America. He refutes the idea that objective journalism is ahistorical; rather it is a construction by market-oriented journalism in the twentieth century to sustain and consolidate news as a product/commodity. Professional journalism is nothing but a decontextualised, and depoliticised entity which generates ignorance and apathy in lieu of informed and passionately engaged citizens.

2.6. Studies on satellite television broadcast news in India

Considering the fact that the present study attempts an account of the arrival of private television news in the region of Assam and north-east India, review of literature on the area revealed that there is almost no research work on the satellite television news channels of Assam. Hence, an attempt was made to arrive at an understanding of the broader ideological context of satellite television in India.

Shanti Kumar (Kumar, 2014) interrogates what constitutes public service television in contemporary India where increasingly private satellite television has disrupted Doordarshan's ideological agenda. One of the key ideas from the study is that binary opposition between 'public' & 'private' television rarely works in practice as commercial interests can and do sometimes serve the public interest through satellite TV news.

In the journal piece, 'Television News & democratic change in India', researcher Srirupa Roy examines the impact of privately owned television news channels on democracy in India, and the related ability of ordinary citizens to access social, political and economic power (Roy, 2011). Through field research emphasizing on media practices, the paper argues that television news expansion has had a 'provincializing effect', in the form of socio-political and economic empowerment of small-town, non-metropolitan actors although deep down older patterns of power and privilege persist. On the other hand, Shakuntala Rao seeks to point out certain positive outcomes of the growth of market driven private satellite news channels vis-à-vis impact on democracy and democratic participation (Rao, 2008).

All in all, the review of literature demonstrated that there is a lack of connected and integrated studies on origin and evolution of Assamese news media from a media and mass communication specific theoretical moorings and perspectives. Accordingly, in a humble way, the present study aims to fill the gap, at least in a limited way, by developing a cogent narrative on the main research questions raised.

References

- Anderson. B. (2015). *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Rawat Publications. Jaipur. Indian edition.
- Barua, P. S. (1999). *Press in Assam: Origin and Development*. Lawyer's Book Stall, Guwahati.
- Barua, G. (2014). *First In*. Gyanam Publications. Guwahati.
- Baruah, S. (1999). *India Against Itself: Assam and the Politics of Nationality*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi.
- Bhagavati, M.R. (2005). *Sambad, Sambadpatra Aru Sambadikata*. Publication Board Assam, Guwahati.
- Bhagavati, M.R. (2007). *Kapling Siga Sambadikata Aru Anyanya*. Publication Board Assam, Guwahati.
- Bhuyan, A. (2012). *Sangbadikatar Akathya*. Aank Baak, Guwahati.
- Borua, C. P. (1997). *A Short History of Assamese Newspapers (1846-1947)*. Sahitya Ratna Prakashan, Guwahati.
- Chowdhury, P. (2014). *Orunodoi*. Student's Store, Guwahati. 2nd Edition.
- Gogoi, A. (2011). *Gana Sangramor Dinlipi*, Aakhor Prakshan, Guwahati.
- Habermas, J. (1989). *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. MIT Press, Massachusetts.
- Herman.S.E and Chomsky.N. (2002). *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*. Pantheon Books, New York. 2nd Edition.
- Jeffrey, R. (2010). *India's Newspaper Revolution: Capitalism, Politics and the Indian-language Press*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi.

- Mahanta, N. (2013). *Confronting the State: ULFA's Quest for Sovereignty*. Sage, New Delhi.
- McChesney. (2010). *The Political Economy of Media: Enduring Issues, Emerging Dilemmas* Aakar Books, New Delhi.
- Mosco. V. (1996). *The Political Economy of Communication*. Sage, New Delhi. 2010 Edition.
- Natarajan, J. (2022). *History of Indian Journalism*. Publications Division, New Delhi.
- Natarajan, S. (1962). *A History of the Press in India*. Asia Publishing House, Bombay.
- Ninan.S. (2007). *Headlines from the Heartland: Reinventing the Hindi Public Sphere*. Sage. New Delhi.
- Ninan, N.P. (2010). *Political Economy of Communications in India*. Sage. New Delhi.
- Rajagopal. A. (2001). *Politics after Television: Hindu Nationalism and the Reshaping of the Public in India*. Cambridge University Press, New York.
- Saikia, C. (1998). *Asamar Batari Kakat-Alocanir Dersa Bachariya Itihas*. Celebration Committee of 150 Years of Newspapers in Assam, Guwahati.
- Kumar, S (2014a). Spaces of Television: Rethinking the Public/Private Divide in Postcolonial India. In Sen, B. and Roy, A. editors, *Channeling Cultures: Television Studies from India*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi.
- Rao, S. (2008). Accountability, democracy and globalization. *Asian Journal of Communication*, Vol.18 (3).
- Roy, S (2011). Television News & democratic change in India. *Media, Culture & Society*, 33 (5).
- Sharma, D. (2013). *Asomia Jatigathan Prakriya Aru Jatiya Janagosthigata Anusthan*. Ekalavya Prakashan, Jorhat.
- Singhal, A. and Rogers, E. (2001). *India's Communication Revolution*. Sage, New Delhi.

Thompson, B.J. (1995). *The Media & Modernity: A Social Theory of the Media*. Stanford University Press, Stanford.

Williams, R. (1974). *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*. Routledge, New York.