Local Press in the Making:

A Study on the Emergent Media of Assam

A thesis submitted in part fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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June, 2014

Abstract

This thesis is an attempt at understanding the evolution of the modern press in Assam and the distinct emergence of the 'local' press as an important category in the media system of the state The study has looked into the historical evolution of the press with reference to the coming of the American Baptist Missionaries in the early nineteenth century, who brought along the first printing press in the region This resulted in publication of the first Assamese journal '*Orunodoi*' (1846), which kick started the process of journalistic endeavour in the state Later on, the press in Assam played an important role in the independence movement of the country, and also took an active interest in the nationalist agitation that took place in the 1980's The shape of the modern press was defined by the sides it took in the process of nationalist discourses that were so prevalent in Assam's history The political influence of the press resulted in a boom in the media sector in the early 1990's This was in consonance with the media boom that was seen all over the country with the regional media being the driving force behind the growth Language newspapers in Assam too started to consolidate, they opened multiple editions and enlarged their readership and this growth continued till the late 2000's The important role played by the press in Assam's history and political life also resulted in growth of a diverse ownership pattern for the press From politicians to business barons to shady criminals everybody was interested in investing and holding a piece of the press pie In 2004, the first satellite channel North East Television was launched from Guwahati, which intended to be a channel for the whole of North East The coming of television made dailies to ramp up their efficiency, the fight for audience began The boom in the satellite television space meant that by the end of 2010 there were seven satellite television channels broadcasting 24x7 from Guwahati

I have studied this boom period in the media scenario, how the print and the television have affected each other in terms of audience The challenges that have arisen from cut throat competition, issues of ownership, the role of money power in press, ethical issues that crop up from time to time have also been looked at as part of the thesis Revenues from advertisements are an important part in any media organization and the television sector is dependent on it for survival The dependence on Television Rating Points (TRP's) had resulted in making media in Assam concerned exclusively about Guwahati as a site of production, as all the TRP boxes were situated in Guwahati Being the state capital even newspapers concentrated on Guwahati Although attempts at localizing content were made by opening editions in district towns, these editions in reality were printing centers, the editing
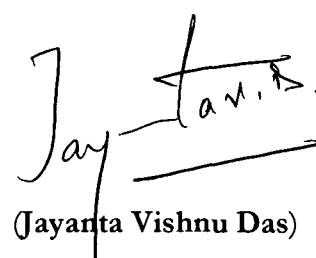
and layout were done in Guwahati itself and the 'local' hardly found space. Cable networks came about in the early 1990's and became important part of people's lives. The cable revolution in India meant that these cable networks beamed numerous channels into people's homes, a change from the single channel Doordarshan broadcasted by the state. In the course of their evolution these networks started locally produced channels which I call local cable channels (LCC's) and became popular in the neighbourhood. They started off with entertainment stuff and the larger networks ventured into local news category. I have looked into two such networks and their constituent channels, and have tried to understand the localizing process that this wired medium is able to achieve. The process of localization in the case of press in Assam has been stuck in the complex structures of ownership, revenue, technology etc., and thus is explained by the existence of both the Guwahati based media and 'other' such 'local spheres'.

DECLARATION

I do hereby declare that the thesis titled "Local Press in the Making: A Study on the Emergent Media of Assam" submitted by me to Tezpur University in part fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Cultural Studies under the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, is a result of my own study and research on the subject and that it has not been submitted to any other institution, including this University in any other form or published at any time before.

Date: 19/06/2014

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This is to certify that the thesis entitled "Local Press in the Making: A Study on the Emergent Media of Assam" submitted to the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Tezpur University in part fulfillment for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Cultural Studies is a record of research work carried out by Mr. Jayanta Vishnu Das 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.

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Acknowledgements

Any journey is made richer by the travelers we meet on the road, people who inspire in the little time that we get to know them. My journey has been one such, where I have met people who have enriched the experience of writing this thesis. I would like to start off by remembering Late Dr. Parag Moni Sarma, my teacher and guide who through his exuberance has given me the enduring lessons of my life.

I would also like to thank my colleagues, each one of them in the department who have seen me through this, and have egged me on with words of encouragement whenever I seemed to have faltered or veered off course. Those progress seminars and endless discussion over cups of sugar-less black tea have indeed been useful. My students have always been my source of inspiration, and their bright faces have added colour to the dull existence of a researcher's life. I am grateful to my students Deepshikha Changmai and Jyotisha Saikia for helping me with the field work. I am also indebted to all my co-scholars in the department whose ideas have added weight to my thesis. I would also like to express my sincere thanks to all the interviewees and also to people who have been involved with the thesis in one way or the other.

My friends have been a source of inspiration all through this journey, and I cannot thank enough Dr. Anbarasan and Dr. Kabi for their valuable inputs and encouragement. Today, I also remember the shortest friendship that I had, yet the most lasting one that I made, I cannot break off the friendship now Late Dr. Kailash Dutta. Your smile will be a constant in my life.

Finally my Supervisior, I cannot thank him enough for the space he has given me to grow with my research. Dr. Parasmoni Dutta's guidance and words of wisdom tells on the final product that is this thesis. I have in the process found an extended family in Dr. Mayuri Bordoloi and Prabahan. I am sure my late grandfather must be watching me, his blessings I forever seek. My grandmother, father and mother, *dada, boudi* and Hridh would be waiting for me to come home, for the months that I have stayed away from them, their love has been overwhelming. I know this period has been tough for Panchali, but we have pulled through this, thank you for being there, when I needed it.

Date: 19/06/2014   (Jayanta Vishnu Das)

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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms Used

AAGSP: All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad

AASU: All Assam Students Union

AIR: All India Radio

CNN: Cable News Network

DAS: Digital Addressable System

DD: Doordarshan

DTH: Direct to Home

GTPL: Gujarat Telelink Private Limited

LCC: Local Cable Channel

LCO: Local Cable Operator

MSO: Multi System Operator

NE TV: North East Television

NRS: National Readership Survey

TAM: Television Audience Measurement

TRAI: Telecom Regulatory Authority of India

TRP: Television Rating Point

TV: Television

TWI: Trans World International

Chapter one

Introduction

1.1 Background

"The further you travel from Delhi the more unpredictable the notion of media becomes" (Ninan, 2009).

The present thesis is an attempt at understanding this unpredictability of the media scene in Assam[1]. Assam witnessed a boom in its media sector in 1990's with language newspapers leading the way. The decade before that the press in Assam had played an active role in the nationalist agitation[2] that took place in Assam. This sudden explosion of the regional press played an important role in the creation of an informed public sphere. The media explosion of the 1990s, commonly going under the shorthand 'globalization', was not without a history, but was marked by a certain concentration of both media forms and temporal acceleration. Consider this: within a few years India saw satellite cable television growing from just a handful to a total of 80 channels, and the growth of other media in the form of cassettes, CDs, VCDs, MP3s, and DVDs. Media ownership was extremely diverse (Sundaram, 2005: 56).

In the national context this was the period that witnessed immense growth that can be attributed to the opening up of the Indian economy to

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[1] Assam is one of the states that form the North Eastern part of India and shares its boundaries with Bangladesh and Bhutan.

[2] The Assam Agitation 1979-85, as it is popularly called was a uprising against the influx of illegal immigrants from bordering Bangladesh, which the people of Assam feared was changing the demography of the state.

foreign investments, a policy encouraged by the then Congress[3] government, and also in part to the influx of the phenomenon of satellite television. Satellite television made a quiet entry during the Gulf war and within a decade established itself as a force to reckon with, upstaging the government broadcaster DD, which used to be the lone player before this. And this growth was driven mostly by the news media of the country. India today has approximately 122 active news channels, the largest number of any country in the world (Kohli-Khandekar, 2011).

Since the time it played an active role in the Assam Agitation, the press in Assam has never looked back. Satellite television channels came up in the year 2004 with the transmission of North East TV. With this the local media scene witnessed competition for audience and with it the rise in fear that newspapers would see a decline in readership with the coming of television. But nothing of that sort happened; News Live another 24x7 news channel was launched in 2008 and was followed by DY 365, a 24x7 news channel launched in the later part of the same year. Other channels soon followed like Prime News, News Time Assam, and Frontier TV in 2010 and added to an ever increasing media market in Assam. "With broadcast media liberalization the number of Indian households with access to television increased exponentially, growing from only a few million in 1984 to 124 million households in 2009, a figure that accounts for approximately 60 percent of the total population" (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2010: 24). And this growth was driven in large part due to the boom witnessed in the regional media scene of the country. As can be seen from Table 1, regional language channels occupied a majority percentage of the total news channel that function in the country today. In fact many channels which are registered as Hindi are actually

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[3] The Congress party formed the government in 1991 with P. V. Narasimha Rao as the Prime Minister and Manmohan Singh as the Finance minister. The government presented a budget that opened up the Indian markets to foreign capital and was called as the policy of liberalization, privatization and globalization (lpg).

broadcasted in dialects of Hindi, hence increasing the share of regional media.

Language	Percentage (total number of news channels)
Hindi*	28
English	9
Tamil	10
Telegu	9
Malayalam	6
Kannada	6
Bengali	5
Marathi	4
Punjabi	3
Oriya	3
Assamese	1
Urdu	1
Gujrati	1
Bhojpuri	1
Information Not Available	7
Global languages; 'minor' languages	6
National languages (English; Hindi*)	37
Regional languages	50

Table 1: Language-wise breakdown of news channels

Source: Government of India, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (2010).

In this study I analyze the role of emerging media in the context of Assam, and what makes the idea of a local press in a globalized world where ideas of culture are increasingly changing with shift in centers of production. Rather, the concept of the local can no longer be taken in

isolation but rather in conjunction with the global. Over the years the word globalization has progressively been used to refer to a process through which the entire human population is bonded into a 'single system' (Wallerstein, 1990), a 'single society' (Albrow, 1990), or 'the structuration of the world as a whole', as defined by Robertson (1990). Terms such as 'glocal' and 'glocalization' are increasingly being used to define the blend of the global and the local. These definitions have their criticism as well, mostly in the third world context where scholars see the "global village more as a threat to cultural identities and pluralism rather than as an opportunity to create a more consensual culture among neighbouring people" (Goonasekera, 2001: 278).

1.2 Defining 'Local' and 'Local Press'

The etymology of the word *local* has been traced back to the Latin *locālis* (around 1400-50 A.D). However, the contemporary interest in the term 'local' arises from the interest in the idea of the global. The industrialization process and the subsequent globalization made scholars to look at the idea of the local. Barber (1992) had defined the idea of globalization in direct opposition to the idea of localization. "There are tendencies [in global capitalism] going in opposite directions. On the one hand, there's a tendency toward this international centralization of power. There's also an opposite tendency. All around the world, there's much more involvement in grassroots organizations, there's regionalism [and moves toward developing] more local autonomy (Noam Chomsky interview, 1993 cited in Wilson and Dissanayeke: 1996: 01). On the other hand Robertson (1995) had in fact argued from examples from the business world, the term 'glocalization'. He sees the new phenomenon as some kind of a blend of the concept of 'global' and 'local' which is increasingly growing popular in business terminology. This idea was a

kind of hybridization where the two ideas were not necessarily in contrast to each other, whereas in other studies the 'local; was constructed to be opposite of 'global'. The impact of globalization was seen to be a danger to local cultures. Thus, most arguments surrounding 'global' and the 'local' were centered on the concept of 'culture'.

The area of the 'local' is undefined. So, for obvious reasons the idea of the local is often constructed on administrative or cartographic definitions of areas. "Lack of clear, shared definitions does not, however, prevent people from being attached to their region of residence" (Aldridge, 2007: 11). Whereas ideas such as multi-national, trans-national, nation states or international organizations are constructed as global ideas, the 'local' struggles for a definitive area. Territoriality however, has often been considered an important consideration as Held *et al.* explains 'local' in communication terminology as "consolidation of flows and networks within a specific locale" (1999: 16). The immediate locality is also the arena for many important social relationships (Aldridge, 2007: 08).

Folk media, participatory media etc. have always been constructed as local form of media. The production and dissemination of information of such media is generally considered to be in a local area. With the increase in focus on communication disciplines such as 'Development Communication' (Melkote, 1991), there has been a renewed interest in the scope of the local to bring about change in society. The importance of the 'local sphere' has been emphasized in such communication theories, to create opinion and views in matters that affect the local population. Dirlik has argued the local "as a site both of promise and predicament" (1996: 22). He says it "serves as a site for the working out of the most fundamental contradictions of the age" (*ibid* 1996: 23). Where the idea of the local can be empowering and emancipatory in its very ideals, there is a fear of parochialism and dictatorial tendencies taking over.

The importance, of the local, as a space that is growing with increase in the focus on the global has indeed led to a better understanding of our own locality in our daily lives. It has emerged as a resistant, and the location of production of culture that is appropriated by the globalizing forces. Wilson and Dissayanake define this process thus:

> ... a new world-space of cultural production and national representation which is simultaneously becoming more globalized (unified around dynamics of capitalogic moving across borders) and more localized (fragmented into contestatory enclaves of difference, coalition, and resistance) in everyday texture and composition...contemporary interface of global forces, images, codes, sites, genres and technologies of transnationalization with those more local communities, tactics, and symbolic strategies of cultural location that confront and challenge them in the production of locality, local subjects, national situations, and the making of everyday space and public spheres of existence (1996: 01).

Thus we see that the term 'local' has increasingly become de-territorialized concepts acting as the basic units for the production of everyday space. Yet, at the same time such space have been located as counter to global forces which are based on the ideas of local production of symbols and codes, and in effect culture, which ties the people of a locality in a cohesive unit. All such units of production therefore can be termed as 'local' for the sake of this study. As Aldridge (2007: 14) points out that "there is little doubt that for many people, their stake in their area of residence is based not only on issues of convenience but goes well beyond behaviour into the realm of sentiments. We should not, therefore, be surprised that there is a well-established appetite for local news".

Further, the understanding and application of the word *press* in the context of this study need little clarification. Here, by press I not only mean the print medium, as it is sometimes understood in the techno-historical sense; but I use it as an umbrella term encompassing all the

media of mass communication as made clear by Siebert *et al.* (1956) in their book '*Four Theories of the Press*'. In addition to the print, Siebert, Schramm and Peterson also include radio, film and television in their study. Besides such academic understanding about the inclusive coverage of the word press, there are also instances of non-academic application of such connotations: for example, a *press-meet* is not necessarily restricted to the print medium alone; it includes the electronic press as well.

1.3 Contextualizing Assam

"Press in Assam has seen a massive upsurge of interest from various quarters such as capitalist businessman; political leaders, interest groups as Sevanti Ninan (2009) in her article points out "regional media is increasingly a colourful mosaic in terms of who owns it or runs it, be it TV or newspapers, or periodicals. And a State which runs the gamut of possibilities is Assam. Congressmen, ULFA[4] (United Liberation Front of Asom) sympathizers, former militants, former bureaucrats and police officers, litterateurs and novelists: the State's proprietors and editors are drawn from all these categories". This is true of most regional media today in India. Politicians have tried to use media for their own purpose and what better than to own it. In states such as Tamil Nadu, Kerala, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, etc. politicians have stake in the media either by owning it themselves or through companies that runs at their behest. Regional media today 'offers a product line that is dizzying in its diverse array of languages, ownership structures, and topics' (Viswanath and Karan, 2000: 92).

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[4] ULFA is a militant organization that was formed in 1979 for the establishment of a sovereign state of Assam. The government of India has labeled it as a terrorist organization.

In print, India has approximately 5,000 news dailies, in both English and vernacular languages (Ravindranath, 2005: 11). By 2006, Assam recorded twenty-three daily newspapers, eleven of them claiming circulations of more than 25,000. By 2007 The Registrar of Newspapers in India claimed for Assamese a circulation figure of more than 600,000 copies daily. And this figure kept on increasing till 2011, when for the first there was a marginal drop in readership recorded. The media situation in Assam is such that people with causes to champion are prepared to put up money to have a voice in print, while potential readers had reason for curiosity- both as spectator voyeurs and as citizens who realized that knowledge of political activity could keep one out of trouble (Jeffrey, 2000: 241). A state of 30 million today boasts of around 30 dailies and seven 24x7 news and entertainment channels. The appetite for news media can be gauged from this exponential growth in the number of publications in a comparatively small state.

But this boom in media has also seen a rise of the concentration of media in Guwahati[5]. Language newspapers who published from other towns have felt themselves alienated from the nerve center Guwahati, so much so that some of them had to move out of the districts[6] and set shop in the state capital of Guwahati. This undue interest in Guwahati has also led to news stories and programmes having a clear Guwahati centric bias and in the process the other parts of the state felt left out. Big towns such as Dibrugarh, Nagaon, Jorhat, Silchar did not as a result have an outlet for their agenda. This vacuum was filled to a great extent by some of the dailies which started multiple editions from other towns, and also the rise of local cable channels (lcc's) which were town centric. These local cable channels took advantage of the already existing cable networks; their

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[5] Guwahati is the capital of Assam, and also acts as the commercial hub for the whole of the region. It is considered to be the gateway to the North East because of its strategic location.

[6] Assam is divided into a total of twenty seven districts administratively with district headquarters being generally the largest town, and each district is again divided into sub-divisions, there are 58 sub-divisions at present.

delivery mechanism was so strong that the satellite channels too had to take the help of these networks to reach the smaller centers. As a result local issues got a local agency to reach the people of the area. What makes matter interesting is the structure of these cable networks which was conveniently used; de-centralized, grassroots workers and unique revenue sharing and funding mechanism meant that these networks are hugely successful today in the smaller towns and villages.

"Today television is one of the country's most profitable industries. Generating annual revenues of 265.5 billion rupees (approximately US $6 billion) in 2009, the television industry comprises almost half (46 percent) of the Indian entertainment and media market, which is the fourth largest in the world" (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2010: 8). And it is this profit that has attracted people from all sort of background to invest money. The gamut of satellite channels and dailies that have come up in the last few years in Assam shows a diverse ownership pattern ranging from former militants to politicians to contractors.

The Canadian scholar Harold Innis (1951: 29) stated an idea about the power of the medium of press:

> The effect of the discovery of printing was evident in the savage religious wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Application of power to communication industries hastened the consolidation of vernaculars, the rise of nationalism, revolution and new outbreaks of savagery in the twentieth century.

While McLuhan seemed little interested in the economic forces that drove or retarded the development of media technologies, Benedict Anderson (1983: 40, 48) on the other hand comments print-capitalism made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate to others, in profoundly new ways, print driven

by capitalism, created 'languages-of-power' which enabled vast dreams of nations to take shape. As Robin Jeffrey in his seminal work India's Newspaper Revolution says:

> The content of successful Indian-language newspapers was subtly local and rarely dull. In some circumstances, to be sure, they could powerfully propel political parties and movements opposed to the central government of the day. But the overall thrust of their news-gathering and dissemination was to propagate subliminal ideas about the existence and legitimacy of an Indian state and an Indian nation (2000:9).

The contextualization of the media space in terms of the uniqueness of the local dimensions of politics, nationalism, etc. was bound to create a thriving consciousness of ideas and notions. The role of the local media thus as Sevanti Ninan puts it:

> ...the localization of coverage by the print media expanded the existing public sphere at the district level, and then reinvented it unconsciously through its segmentation of editions. This had consequences for the political class and for civil society. It shaped the individual's citizens sense of belonging; it added a new dimension to his identity. At the same time in nurturing the local it made newspapers relevant to a much wider readership...Its commercialization of the election process, its democratization of access to its pages and the resulting inclusiveness of the news universe, its revival of dialect and its self-conscious reassertion of tradition in order to win over the mass reader, were processes within this reinvention (2007: 26).

1.4 Statement of the Problem

The underlying argument of this thesis, which spreads across the empirical observations and the analyses in Chapter III to V, is that the

process of localization of the press operates within a complex hierarchy of media-structures and media-territories. This hierarchy (which is crucially, but not solely, influenced by the ethnic, linguistic and administrative hierarchies) facilitates in constructing the demarcations between the 'communitarian self' and the 'other' at multiple levels. This making of the local press involves inventing new semiotic vocabularies and new narratives to define and celebrate the 'local', within a specific media space created in contrast with the already available global, national or mainstream media.

I argue in this thesis that the process of localization cannot be equated with establishing multiple editions. In the case of Assam, although the newspapers first started multiple editions in 1997 with *Amar Asom*[7], and followed by other dailies, these editions rather than democratizing the news process only succeeded in reducing the time it took to reach the readers. For, practical reasons Guwahati, the state capital remained the hub of news collection and page designing, and all hopes of a reassertion of the local in the news sphere failed in the long run. The establishment of satellite television which came up in 2004 in Assam was seen as threat to the newspapers hegemony in the media universe. Television, with its boon of technology had the reach that no newspaper could dream of, it also created new audience and illiteracy was no longer an issue. But television, in its process of consolidation and competition with its peers, confined itself to a limited space. Channels which started with programming in multiple languages started to concentrate on a single language. The regional media itself was aping the national agenda of being undemocratic in its content and programming. The sense of identity and belonging of the audience to such a media becomes questionable. It is in this context I study the role and content of local cable channels run by the cable operators in the local domain, media which reaches a limited geographical space and audience.

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[7] An Assamese daily newspaper published from Guwahati established in 1997.

1.5 Objectives of the Study

Therefore it is in this context of Assam the objectives of the study are:

a) To understand the evolutionary processes (historical) behind the birth of media in Assam

b) To analyse the growth of satellite television channels post 2000.

c) To study the coverage of local issues by the media in Assam

d) To analyse issues of ownership, ethics, political influence in print and electronic media in Assam today

e) To understand the function of, and role played by, cable networks and local cable channels

1.6 Literature Review

For any work which includes such diverse theoretical areas, I have tried to provide a review of relevant literature that has informed this present study. Although the actual literature referred to is much wider and vast in its scope I present a handful of those here ranging from topics such as media systems, media and public sphere, media and globalization, local media, media in India, media and nation, media in Assam etc.

Robin Jeffrey in his seminal work *'India's Newspaper Revolution: Capitalism, Politics and the Indian-Language Press'* talks about the growth of India's newspapers driven mainly by the language press. He provides a detailed account of how the process of localization, opening new editions helped the newspapers drive growth in the smaller centers. He also talks about the ownership pattern of media in India and also the relation between the state, politics and press in contemporary times.

'Television at Large in South Asia' edited by Aswin Punathambekar and Shanti Kumar cover a large range of articles on Television with particular reference to South Asia. 'Mapping India's Television Landscape: Constitutive Dimensions and Emerging Issues' by Kalyani Chadha and Anandam Kavoori talk about the origin and evolution of Indian television from the DD days to satellite channels. They also argue about the limited format of programming in Indian television. While in another article 'Watching Barkha Dutt: Turning on the News in Television Studies', Radhika Parmeswaran raises issue about the rising class of news anchors who represent the new elite. The rise of news as the most powerful form of programming has led to questions of class, gender and television celebrities especially in light of the Radiia Tapes scandal that broke out where few journalists were accused of acting as lobbyists for corporate houses.

Sunetra Sen Narayan in her book *'Globalization and Television: A Study of the India Experience, 1990-2010'* writes specifically about broadcasting scenario in India, and the effect globalization has on it. And carries on to document the rise of satellite television post 1990's and also looks into the broadcasting regulations and Acts that have been in place from time to time which have shaped Indian television the way it is today.

Sevanti Ninan in *'Headlines from the Heartland: Reinventing the Hindi Public Sphere'* studies the process of creation of a local media discourse, and how it affected the national media. Ninan is particularly interested in the process how news is gathered and produced locally thus creating an alternative public sphere to the English media. She explores how the growth of vernacular journalism has changed the way how news is made in today's context in India.

Raymond William's classic text *'Television'* is the first attempt of its kind to analyse the evolution of Television and its influence on human

society. Rather than focusing on television and its programming, William explores the way the technological structures affect its characteristics forms. He looks into the relation between technology and society and situates television in that context. He also infact starts the debate on the role of institutions in shaping television and how programme flows are dictated in a television situation.

'Imagined Communities: Reflection on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism' by Benedict Anderson is one of the most important texts on the idea of nationalism. He theorizes 'nation' as a socially constructed idea where people imagine themselves to be part of the nation. His idea of a nation is a modernist project and he argues that the birth of a imagined community feeling came about with the rise in 'print-capitalism' where books were increasingly being printed in standardized languages that people understood thus giving rise to imagined communities.

Partha Chatterjee in his book *'The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Post-Colonial Histories'* questions the modular forms of nationalism that the Asian and African countries have to choose from as set by the West. He resists the notion that the colonized should follow the western model of imagined community and get enlightenment and even must in subjugation follow the anti-colonial resistance as preached by western models. He questions if all has been imagined on our behalf, what is left for us to imagine? And thus contends that the model of nationalism is a ploy for our imaginations also to be colonized forever.

In the article 'Tongue has No Bone: Fixing the Assamese Language', Bodhisattva Kar tries to understand the historical process of the creation of a vernacular vis-à-vis the Assamese language in relation to the evolving print culture and the grammatical debate surrounding the language. The article also studies the dialectical questions involving the Assamese language.

'Social Criticism in Nineteenth Century Assamese Writing: The *Orunodoi*' is an article by Tilottoma Misra, where she elaborates on the kind of articles that were published in the first Assamese journal '*Orunodoi*'. She explores how ideas of Indian Renaissance trickle down into the writing of the journal. Particularly, the Assamese intellectuals based in Calcutta during the nineteenth century who were witness to change brought about by western education, contributed articles saying how these would be useful for the Assamese population as well.

'Murdochization' of the Indian press: from by-line to bottom-line' by Prasun Sonwalkar published in the journal *Media, Culture and Society*, talks about the growth of the Indian Press right from the colonial times. Sonwalkar is interested in the corporatization of the Indian media industry and cites the role that The Times of India played in the process. Sonwalkar also talks about the status of English, and its importance in the media process. He argues that the 'Murdochization' process was started by the leading English dailies initially.

'Cultural imperialism or vernacular modernity? Hindi newspapers in a globalizing India' by Taberez Ahmed Neyazi looks into the growth and rise in popularity of Hindi newspapers in India. Neyazi argues that the growth of Hindi dailies have given rise to the notion of vernacular modernity which is critical appropriation of the concept of western modernity. Through a process of indigenization the Hindi dailies produce local cultural values in globalized forms which are a hybrid form of production, a deliberate mix of the global and the local.

Ravi Sundaram in his article 'Media globalization: an Indian perspective' gives an insight into the process of Indian media going global. He talks about the reach of Indian cinema to the Middle East countries and even the erstwhile USSR. But television saw a rise only in the 1990's. For him the 80's was the decade of preparation where the state

broadcaster DD established a broad television public which later was transformed into the satellite television revolution that happened in the 1990's. He divides Indian media into two layers, one the large corporate media houses and in the second he says the large network of informal media space which retailed the new cultural constellation to the mass of citizens like the cable networks, phone booths, internet café etc.

Understanding the Local Media by Meryl Aldridge explores the notion of local media in the context of a global perspective. With vanishing boundaries between nations and an age where the global is becoming more a rule rather than an exception, the focus on local media is a niche area of concern today. The book explores questions such as the idea of a community in context of media, and the balance between national and local media.

In the book *The Media and Modernity: A Social Theory of the Media*, John B. Thompson tries to provide a social grounding to media theories. He looks into the history of growth of modern society and the role played by media. He talks about the initial concerns about cultural imperialism through globalization and he theorizes the debate on globalization and localization, and introduces the idea of media globalization.

1.7 Research Design

The study, keeping in mind the nature of the topic and the field of work, relied on both primary and secondary sources to back up the theoretical groundings. The study is purely qualitative in nature where the data is analyzed for its accuracy to back up the claims made in the findings. The field work was divided into two sections, as per the methodology chosen for the study. In the first part the state of Assam was taken to be the field

and all media organizations, print or electronic, currently operating were taken into consideration. Since it was not possible to collect data from each and every media house it was decided to limit the field. So, I decided to rely on a combination of non-probability methods such as purposive and snowball sampling to zero in on the respondents for the study. In the second part I conducted case studies on two local cable channels and networks operating in the state. Again, purposive sampling was deployed to zero in on the channels for the study. I also employed observation as a method of analytical tool in this context. Being a media researcher gives me the advantage of being a non-participant observer to the developments that have taken place in the state of Assam in the context of media.

Secondary data or past literature on Assam press was of prime importance for the study to draw a historical thread to the present boom in media. A chapter has also been dedicated to elaborate on this context. Lot of articles and literature from the missionaries of Assam came in handy to study the early evolution of press in Assam. Also, Readership surveys, industry reports and reports of the government have been employed throughout the thesis to back up the empirical claims.

1.7.1 Sample Category

For the first part of the fieldwork I conducted 15 interviews (see appendix 1), people who hold professional positions in the media organizations and have been active in journalism for a considerable period of time representing local newspapers, television channels, national dailies with local editions, national daily correspondents etc. The advantage of doing a qualitative research is that I did not have to think about the sample to be representative and justifiable. As Livingstone and Lunt have argued "qualitative methods compensate for their lack of reliability with greater

validity" (1996: 92).The experience that the respondents brought to the table could not be measured in terms of research objectivity. As Wolcott pointing to the importance of the end result of any research says "reliability redirects attention to research processes rather than to research results" (1995: 167).

For the second part of the study I conducted two case studies for the objective on the cable network and channels where the proprietors and editors of those organizations were also subjected to in depth interviews. Again, the networks Barak Television Network (BTN) and V&S Cable were chosen purposively, as these two networks cover a large part of the state, and operate in two distinct geographical locations the Barak valley[8] and the Brahmaputra valley catering to diverse population.

1.7.2 Instrumentation

The interviewee were not supplied with any definite structured questionnaire; rather the interviews were semi-structured and informal in nature where I started the interview with a few lead questions on the relevant topics and then took it up from there, based on the responses of the participants. The interview guide was not strictly followed for the purpose, and incorporated changes according to the demands of the situation. All the interviews were recorded using a voice recorder and analyzed and transcribed later on and I took notes during the interviews, which were matched at the time of analysis. The structure of the interviews thus was practically decided by the respondents, giving the interviews a free wheeling chat feel which made the respondents open up to me and made them feel at ease. The interviews lasted from 20 minutes to an hour. The interviews were analyzed by a coding process where they

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[8] The state of Assam geographically can be divided into two major valleys named after the rivers that flow through them, the Brahmaputra valley and the Barak valley.

were studied thematically. This process helped me in evolving a structure for the research based on my theoretical arguments.

For the second part of my field work I conducted in depth interviews with my respondents. These interviews were more structured in nature and were backed up by my observation of the day-to-day operation of the local networks and the channels run by them.

1.7.3 Secondary Sources

I had to bank on secondary information in the course of the study from various sources. Sources such as Registrar of Newspapers in India, Audit Bureau of Circulation figures, National Readership Survey figures, Statistical Handbook of Government agencies, Gazette notifications, Government Acts, Supreme Court judgments, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting reports, industry reports and became important source of information to back up the data and claims.

1.8 Structure of the Theses

The thesis has been divided into six broad chapters excluding the bibliography. The first and the sixth chapter constitute the introduction and conclusion respectively. Following is a brief layout of the chapters of the theses.

The first chapter is the introduction which contains essential review of existing literature on the question of local media, the media in India, and the print revolution, the rise of the language press and also on the

cable television phenomenon. It states out the objectives of the study and the methodology employed.

The second chapter deals with the theoretical framework of the present study. It touches on the question of nation and the media, media and democratic processes, the ideas for development media and controlled media for development. Also finds prominence in such issues of local media is the idea postulated by Juergen Habermas and the question of public sphere its recent criticism and the rise of the political public sphere. The chapter proposes a criticism of the postulation forwarded by Siebert *et al's 'Four Theories of the Press'* and develops further arguments on evolving media systems.

The third chapter deals with the birth of media in Assam, the advent of missionaries[9] in Assamese society and their role in bringing about modern education and letters to this part of the country. This chapter also outlines the role of the press during the freedom movement and more particularly the role of the press during the Assam Agitation. In some respect the Assam agitation could be said to be the starting point for the modern Assamese press that we see today. This chapter is based on secondary data based on sources available in the public domain such as missionary history. The chapter ends with concluding remarks on the press in the post-agitation days.

The fourth chapter is a qualitative chapter based on field work on the present state of media in Assam, and the issues concerning it in the present day context. It takes the help of data to substantiate the rise of political influence in media, issues of media ownership and how these are related to the ideas of ethics in media. It also highlights the sudden spurt of satellite television channels, the increasing demand for trained

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[9] The American Baptist Missionaries came to Assam in 1830 on their evangelical activity and set up the first printing press in Sivasagar, Assam (see chapter iii).

journalists, and the sustainability issues of journalism as a profession for the younger generation. The chapter ends with the questions of grassroots journalism and local development questions which are neglected by the Guwahati based media houses and a consequential vacuum in the small towns and villages.

The fifth chapter again is field based chapter on the local cable networks and channels. The researcher presents two case studies conducted on cable networks and analyzes their organizational structure in terms of the network as well as the local channels run by them. An analysis of the relevant Supreme Court judgment and the Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act, 1995 is presented at the beginning of the chapter. The role the cable channels play in bringing to the fore the local agenda and to what extent are they successful, the challenges they face in the onslaught of digitization and legal issues involved etc make up the body of this chapter.

The final chapter is the conclusion of the thesis and lays out the findings of the research and discusses the ideal media environment for a state like Assam and what could be the future road map. The thesis ends with a list of bibliography, and includes two appendices, firstly, the list of interviewees and secondly, the Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act, 1995.

1.9 Limitation of the Thesis

As this thesis does not intent a comprehensive historical analysis of the birth of press in Assam, the period from 1846 to the Assam Agitation is only encapsulated with few highlighted incidents rather than an in depth study which can be left open for future researches on the subject. The historicization is focused towards the waves of emergent media only.

Chapter two

Theories of Media Systems

In this chapter I look into the concepts of media systems that have been formulated by media theorists while analyzing media systems around the world. The idea of media systems was for the first time forwarded by Fred Siebert, Theodore Peterson and Wilbur Schramm in their classic text *Four Theories of the Press* published in 1956. Their typology of press included other media like radio, television and films. This typology has come under immense scrutiny and has been revised by many scholars from time to time. For the sake of my research I look into such other models that have been forwarded and try to understand the relation between media and society.

2.1 Media Ownership and Control

With the advent of parliamentary politics around the world, the press aligned itself gradually with the political parties. The control of press is seen to have merely shifted from state control to control by politicians. With changing economic environment, the ownership and control of the press gradually passed over to owner-entrepreneurs. This was maybe because the parties could not bear the rising cost of running newspapers. The press needed to be self-supporting in order to survive (Boyce, 1987; Curran, 1991; Curran and Seaton, 1991). Advertising as such rose in prominence and wielded much power; the repercussions being that the press would be run as commercial enterprise only.

The new entrepreneurial class of owners of the press tried to use it as an independent source of power with which to challenge reigning centers of power and their policies. The press barons wielded this power because they commanded the opinion of their readers who were huge in number. At times they played the roles of kingmakers; they successfully brought down governments and crowned leaders of their choice. Some of the press owners ran their organizations as commercial enterprises in order that they may use them principally for ideological ends (Boyce, 1987; Negrine, 1989).

However, in the normal run of events the press could not function as an independent locus of political power, in an extremely complex equation that involved politics, money and power. The nature of political situations, more than the press itself, determined the kind of influence wielded. The accusation of unheeded power and economic clout was also alleged against the press. It becomes clear that the press depended to a large extent on a close relationship with the ruling elite, which gave it the source of money, power and ultimately legitimacy. As such the relationship could be said to have been symbiotic, with political class also depending on the press to disseminate their agenda, the real power rested with the constitutionally elected leaders (Boyce, 1987: 109).

The rapidly changing economic scenario altered the structure of press ownership in major ways. As the press became expensive to run, advertising emerged as a major source of revenue. The advertisers too, as they wanted to reach a wider audience, discouraged the press to patronize the political leanings of owner-entrepreneurs. It also became more economically productive to run the media as private companies with ownership being shared among many stockholders. A more decentralized ownership pattern took away the locus of power from one individual and made it into a more complex structure. Control practically shifted to the professionals, who ran the daily affairs at the ground level.

Marxist scholars are of the view that the cost of opening media enterprises, market entry costs, are so high that only the capitalist class can venture into it. Even then, this class too depends on other sources of capital so that the media organizations can get started. This actually supports the presumption that it is those with diverse connections with other successful sectors of the economy that can start new media (Murdock, 1982).

The Marxist theorists argue that effective ownership in terms of controlling the power centers of these organizations still remains in the hands of a few capitalists, although the structures might have changed considerably in favour of multiple share holders. The resulting scenario is one where a few capitalists control the most important sectors of the economy including the media industries (Murdock, 1982).

As new technologies emerge, it has increasingly become clear that media professionals can be laid off as they are made redundant. The advent of new media technologies has not helped in the promise of diversity of ownership or enhanced access to the media for the people. In fact, on the contrary, it is the control by owners that is seen to have been strengthened (Boyce, 1987; Murdock, 1982).

Even though advertising, from a liberal perspective, seems to have freed the press from political control, it introduced its own set of complications and control. Theorists argue that advertisers are part of the commercial and capital spectrum within which the media itself operates, and their relation to media is a result of that complex relation. The influence of market forces on media is:

> In general the needs of production, limitations of cost, and concern for audiences, produce news in which the world is portrayed as fragmented and unchanging, and in which dissent and opposition appear ephemeral, peripheral or irrational. News become palliative and comforting,

intentionally undisturbing and unthreatening, focusing on institutions of consensus maintenance and the handling of social order...In seeking to maximize this market, products must draw from the most widely legitimated central values while rejecting the dissenting voice or the incompatible objection to the ruling myth (Murdock and Golding, 1977: 40).

Advertising has immense ideological implications. It creates a dream world and therefore masks and distorts real relationships of power and dominance (Negrine, 1989: 80). As Murdock and Golding (1977:37) argue:

> ...the voices which survive will largely belong to those least likely to challenge the prevailing distribution of wealth and power. Conversely, those most likely to challenge these arrangements are unable to publicize their dissent or opposition because they cannot command the resources needed for effective communication to a broad audience.

It is clear that ownership of media organizations has implications for control and use. It can also be said that this control certainly impacts on media performance. But the idea is whether or not ownership the only determining factor. The problem of arguably single source of power is compounded by the fact that the idea of media is generic and does not always refer to a single idea or organization. There have been innumerable empirical study but it is not easy to prove that a causal relationship between media ownership and media control indeed exists, or for that matter between media ownership and media performance. Such relationships are normally complex and the contours of such relationship hardly discernible. In the words of Gallagher (1982: 170-171):

> The complex of constraints... within which communication organizations and professionals operate, makes it difficult to sustain a view of the media and media practitioners as autonomous 'watch-dogs'

On the other hand, to the extent that the media can be observed to negotiate the parameters of constraint- exercising at least at times, a policy of 'brinksmanship'- they cannot be dismissed as subservient 'tools of government'. Rather, the general conclusion must be that mass communication is indeed bound with, and bounded by, the interiors of the dominant institutions of society, but that these interests are continually redefined through a process to which the media themselves contribute.

A general proposition that to some extent, individual or private ownership of the media is biased in support of capital interests and their ideologies is not out of order. That content is largely dependent on the access of market forces to such organizations and their economy is also obvious. In such a scenario where not all news gets equal weightage due to the overriding factors of market interests and its relation to media organizations, influence of profit seeking motives, it can be argued that media cannot be seen to foster a truly democratic political process (Negrine, 1988).

2.2 Models of Broadcasting

2.2.1 Commercial Model

This version of the media model equates the interests of the public with the financial security of the industry under regulation (Avery and Stavitsky, 2000: 53). The profitability and commercial interests of the media companies serving the "audience-as-market" (Ang, 1991) is a marker of the viable use of the media license.

The first step in this kind of marketplace approach to broadcast regulation, then, is to not to focus on broadcasters as fiduciaries of the

public….but as marketplace competitors (Fowler and Brenner, 1982: 3-4). In fact, Couldry defines the rise of the commercial model as a result of "market populism… which claims markets as the privileged site of popular voice" (2010: 12).

It is a given that media are important in the constitution of modern societies, both developed and developing, both historically and epistemologically. They are of strategic importance in countries such as India if important messages are to reach a widely dispersed population in a large geographical area in a short span of time. This double function as transmitters of information as well as interpreters of social phenomenon is related to the theorization of the media as message carriers. Thus media is also theorized as a system of symbolic manifestations.

The media are part of the modern economic systems; they need to be invested in order that they may continue to operate in a profit or loss making environment. Profit making thus becomes the source of sustenance and revenue from advertisements or state subsidy the lifeline of such organizations. Another possibility is a combination of both in varying degrees. This economic or commercial dimension constitutes media organization as material systems (see Murdock, 1991). As part of an ever increasing economy thus selling pressure becomes the sole criteria of judging content of media. They prefer programmes that entertain the audience and sustain their buying mood (Herman and Chomsky, 1988: 17).

The symbolic and economic aspects of media and the importance of this in the context of media especially in relation to democratic process has been an area of study for communication theorists and researchers (Bennett, 1982; Boyce, 1987; Curran, 1982; 1991a; Golding and Murdock, 1991; McQuail, 1987).

The power of the media lies in the fact that they can reach a wide section of the masses which would be impossible through any other means and thus they are regarded as a source of power for those who know and wield them. This belief rests on the argument that whoever has control over the media has access to the public and can therefore use the media as a means of controlling their political beliefs and agenda. Therefore the belief, that in the field of politics it becomes very important who owns the media.

2.2.2 Guardianship Model

The guardianship model is characterized by its impetus to produce enlightened and informed viewers. It is an emulation of the ideals of social liberals like John Dewey and Walter Lippmann, who argued that the "public needed education, leadership, socialization" (Artz, 2000: 5).

The guardianship model sees the "audience-as-public" (Ang, 1991: 28). This model does not emphasize on the participation of citizens. The guardianship model can be defined as an "aid-without-development...creates dependencies" on these enlightened public intellectuals capable of guiding the public (Artz, 2000: 6). The guardianship model can also be argued to be identical to the "informed citizen model" (Avery and Stavitsky, 2000: 57) that frames the public in need of defined targeted selected information so that they might turn into better citizens in a democracy. This model is a top down approach which takes a position of knowledge to be given to the masses. It takes the public to be uninformed and who are in need of guidance and support. The guardianship model was one of the initial ideas for the public service broadcasters to transmit programmes for social upliftment especially in the developing and the under-developed economies.

2.2.3 Technology Model

The technology model argues that technology is not the guaranteed path to achieve the goals of media reform. Media reform theorists resist the idea that the internet or other such modern communication systems system is going to democratize media production. Or for that matter the distribution system itself and bring about the ideal situation of dethroning the existing media system and its controllers. Every new technology has promised the ideals of democratization finally reaching the media sector, and each networked communication system becomes prey to the existing media ownership structure. Cable television was first promised as breaking the monopoly, providing space for public interest broadcasters and commercial interests alike. As Wu (2010) notes, what tends to result is each emergent communication system being colonized by commercial companies. Thus it becomes irrelevant that the internet, as a technology, as an inexpensive system, has made media reform issues irrelevant and inconsequential. Media reformers argue against the idea that the infinite "long tail" (Anderson, 2006) of shelf space provided by the internet (new technology) has created a new world in which state regulation are unnecessary. Powerful forces soon transform ideal democratized communication systems (new technology) into commercial entities that bear profits. Technologies tend to be only innovations where public funding is necessary if the ideal situation for the public sphere is to be met on any present or future networked communications systems (McChesney and Nichols, 2010).

2.3 Four theories of the Press

Siebert, Schramm and Peterson (1956) argued for a philosophical identity as the basis of differentiation between different press systems that they

theorized. And these philosophical and political rationales they deemed were the important markers of the press systems around the world. The rise of mass communication as a distinct discipline has give rise to only two to four theories of the press depending on the definitional approaches. The argument is that the Soviet Communist Theory is a reworked version of the still obsolete Authoritarian theory of the Press and again the Social Responsibility is an advancement of the Libertarian Theory. Siebert *et al.* have treated the theoretical formulations in a different manner based on the argument that the Soviets had produced a system different from earlier authoritarianism which is so important to contemporary society, and also because the Social Responsibility theory had charted the apparent direction of development which the Anglo-American press was seen to be taking (1956: 1-6).

Four Theories of the Press (1956) was accepted by global scholars when McQuail (1987:111) categorized them among six normative media theories. According to McQuail:

> The first attempt at a comparative statement of major theories of the press dates from 1956 (Siebert *et al.*) and it remains the major source and point of reference for work of this kind. The four-fold division by Siebert *et al.* has been retained, although supplemented by two further types, in recognition of more recent developments in thinking, if not in practice. It may be that the original 'four theories' are still adequate for classifying national systems, but as the original authors were aware, it can often be that actual media systems exhibit alternative, even inconsistent, philosophical principles. It thus appropriated to add further theories to the original set.

Since 1956, numerous media thinkers (Curran, 1991a; McQuail, 1991; Skogerbo, 1991) have subjected Siebert *et al.*'s Four Theories to criticism. The criticism arises out of the fact that they are closely linked to the liberal pluralist approach. Taking the American system as the only

model of democracy and the ultimate choice also comes for criticism. The idolization of the American system thus can be seen in itself to be an inkling of fundamental biases within that society.

A major weakness as analyzed from the perspective of media theorist is the overwhelming argument applied in *Four Theories of the Press* (1956) for their typology of the defined press systems; the dependence on the idea of absolute freedom from the control by the state of press systems. This differentiation is mainly questioned on the idea of the assumption of the control over the media by states through direct or indirect means, rather than contrary to the idea of press freedom itself. Only the 'Social Responsibility' theory, among the lot is not distinguished along this argument. This theory was formulated as a result of Siebert *et al.* arguments of developments within the press organizations, but was later changed due to the pressure of heavy criticism that was faced by this argument of Libertarian theory. The emphasis placed on freedom in the libertarian context is merely extended to include obligations as well, in the social-responsibility framework. (Skogerbo, 1991: 143)

Denis McQuail (1987: 109-134), in the classic text *Mass Communication Theory* used the word normative theories which he used to refer to the theoretical formulations forwarded by Siebert *et al.* And he added two more theories, the Development Media Theory and Democratic-Participant Theory to the original four that were there. Among other sources and basic postulates, McQuail gives importance particularly to McBride Commission report (1980) prepared by Unesco as an argument for the postulation of the Development Media Theory. The pretext for this theoretical assumption as forwarded by UNESCO is its importance to the developing and under developed world and over all for Third world communication given the inapplicability of the four theories.

The special needs of the third world societies form the argument for McQuail. He calls for a different orientation that is needed to serve the interests of these special needs of the developing and under developed societies, and he talks of a normative theoretical argument that indeed serves that purpose. However, critics argue most of these normative assumptions have been talked of in the theories forwarded in *Four Theories of the Press*. As put by Skogerbo (1991: 144-146), in this theory, achieving the development goal is given overriding importance to the extent that its success is seen to justify the abridgement of other human rights and freedoms, especially press freedom. Press freedom has been overlooked in this theory, which becomes a major flaw in the arguments of McQuail as he himself argues for the ideals of democratic communication as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

McQuail (1991) indeed argues for against the four theories in light of changing media scenario and a far more complex relation between media and their environment:

> The confusion over the status of and possible application of normative theory has been made worse by their: high level generality; their lack of direct connection with actual media systems ...In many, if not most countries, the media do not constitute any single 'system', but are composed of many separate overlapping, often theoretically inconsistent elements. For instance, values of independence and impartiality can be pursued with equal chance of success (or lack of it) by systems based either on principles of the free market or under strict public control...(pg. 69).

In spite of the inherent contradictions and weaknesses, the *Four Theories of the Press* (1956) provides for a typology that is important and has undergone constant modification in answer to the criticism leveled against it from time to time. In the process it becomes the initiator for the

further development of ideas to accommodate the understanding of media systems through the lens of normative media theories. The argument being normative theories are useful in measuring out performances of the media and also providing for a definitive scale to measure such performance with the normative tools available.

The normative theories forwarded in the typology presented in *Four Theories of the Press* (1956) can be recasted according to the changing socio-economic and political situations that arise from time to time. Normative theoretical arguments are universal and certainly suited to the media systems of most countries, though with local variations and reformulations. Critical normative analysis can be variously put to use to uncover power structures and dominant systems of oppression.

2.3.1 Development Support Communication

There are different concerns that have emanated in the arguments of the development theory, concerns that have resulted from developments in the field of diffusion of innovation to other more pertinent concerns. The dawn of the realization that other constraints which are mostly socio-economic in nature have resulted in the search for a more suitable option to look into the needs of the developing world that would in effect take all these limitations into consideration. These realizations led to the rise of development communication (Melkote, 1991; Servaes, 1995). This particular tradition has an instrumentalist take on the way media can be used for development. Emphasizing to be able to jump the gap of knowledge that is the domain of area experts in health and agriculture and other such fields and be able to communicate the knowledge to 'the people who are in need of such knowledge and its specific applications to

improve their performance, increase their productivity, improve their health, etc.' (Melkote, 1991: 29).

2.3.2 Controlled Media for Development

Controlled media for development is somewhat similar to the earlier theory the only point of differentiation lie in the fact that it advocates for all round socio-economic upliftment of the society. The Third world depend heavily on the developed world for technology, some specialized skills and cheap, but expensive to produce cultural products (McQuail 1987: 119-121).

In this version of development media theory, societal interests have found preference over individual development. The moot point in this theory being that media should act as the harbinger of good and positive news, and focus on the developmental activities of the government rather than being judgmental or critical about it. Government ownership and control then becomes the norm and twisting the media or even suppressing it is justification enough for the sake of informing the people about its plans and programmes. Governments all across especially in the developing world have deemed media to be only another arm of governance like any other and the sole purpose of it should be to act in public service like normal government agencies. Governments in such societies also hide behind the argument that people need authentic sources of information, not that which misleads. Especially since the illiteracy is quite high and political consciousness low the governments argue for a single ownership of media, held by the government which will enable its goal of development that much more easier. (Mytton, 1983; Ziegler and Asante, 1992).

It can be further added that such kind of political systems always avoid the existence of an active press in the fear that such an act would lead to the emergence of counter political forces and dissident views which might ultimately lead to the instability of the notion of the state itself. Opposition to the state's views and counter political forces might take advantage of the illiterate and ignorant masses, which is pre-conceived notion of this theory, and exploit this ignorance to destabilize the state. In most of the developing and the under developed countries the existence of a political system is quite fragile to really withstand the views and arguments that goes against it, and might also be seen as attempts to question the powers that rule those states. Thus the argument that media has to act in consonance with the diktats of the state and stop short of scrutinizing the affairs of such government.

McQuail (1987: 121) argues, 'in the interest of development ends, the state has a right to intervene in, or restrict, media operations, and devices of censorship, subsidy and direct control can be justified.' Arguments such as these have been used over the years to explain and legitimize the use of media in authoritarian systems. Development has acted as a normative camouflage for the aspirations for dictatorial states and their agendas across the world.

The third idea of development media theory forms the basis of the research in this study. Freedom of expression is of utmost importance in the ideals of this theory and it is theoretically closer to the notion of public sphere. And interactivity and audience discussion and participation at the grassroots level is an important way to achieve this goal of development and also strategizing alternative routes for emancipation. Importantly unlike the earlier model it gives due importance on the essence of upkeep of human rights which forms the basis of the freedom of expression, and the role of the press as the watchdog of societal norms and the democratic order is emphasized (Ansah, 1988). Democratic ideals

as human development objectives become the core ideals for such a system.

Therefore this public sphere model of development can be said to have risen contrary to the ideas of dictatorial inclinations that find encouragement in the name of development. Rogers (1976) argued for the very same participatory process of social change where the stakeholders have a say and control in the way that they can use their resources environment for the benefit of the majority of the society, which essentially means greater equality and freedom in the hands of the people. The earlier version was the easy way of arguing for the taking over of the rights of the people and access to free press, and a fear of criticism that was justified by control by the state.

As is already clear from the arguments, the preferred idea of development also lays emphasis on the socio-economic aspect of development, but more importantly, the fact that development cannot take place without the free participation and willingness of the people for whom development is intended in the first place. It emphasizes on participation in the decision making arena. Therefore it can be presumed, that meaningful participation cannot be achieved in the absence of a society that lets one have right to express oneself freely and frankly. The importance of media of mass communication has to be emphasized here, is its ability to provide for such an environment which allows for democratic participation and interaction among the masses. Media in a democratic set up which wants to progress, should be a conduit and provider of social and universal discussing space and also be an avenue to argue and debate and reach democratically discussed conclusions. Simply put, media's role for the democratization of ideas is foremost, and in this respect it has to provide for a space which becomes the discussing platform for the formation of an active public sphere, the essential element to equitable development in society.

Essentially what this model argues is to look at the context of development from the angle of the participation of media in this role. For the sake of such an analysis, it is pertinent that media is autonomous and outside the purview of government control and political pressures. Journalists in such a society have to understand their role as the harbinger of hope to the people, they need to understand the effects and repercussion of such development to the hopes of the local people, the difference between an ideal scheme and its actual implementation, and the difference between reality and ground situation and its impact on people as claimed by government officials (Aggarwala, 1979: 181). This observation stems from the belief that social and political criticism of any state institution and for that matter any government should not be seen as, necessarily disruptive.

2.4 Public Sphere

One can argue that there are two main directions in which media's functions can be thought of. First media functions may result from an objective and empirical observation of media activity (see Curran, 1991; McQuail, 1987, 1991; Skogerbo, 1991). These functions are then used to describe what role the media plays in relation to what it does or accomplishes. In this functionalist perspective, institutionalized activities of the media are taken to as serving the needs of the particular society to which it belongs.

Secondly, media functions defined as mainly as normative ideal-types can be seen as a particular society's expectations and hopes and conditions for media performance. These are variously defined by theorists in their formulations of normative functions for the media (Ansah, 1988; Curran, 1991; Siebert *et al.* 1956; McQuail 1987, 1991;

Skogerbo, 1991). These normative functions may also form the basis and standards based on which to appraise media performance. According to McQuail (1991: 70), a normative framework is the underlying backbone because it is laid by a fundamental assumption that the media do serve the 'public interest' or 'general welfare'. This means that the mass media are different from other business or industry, but carry out tasks which are of benefit to a wider section of the society, especially in the cultural and political life.

It is in the first sense above that Habermas related to the role of the press as an ideal democratic discussion space. In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere,* Habermas (1986) points out that the ideals of capitalism that grew in eighteenth century Britain as a result of the free market economy that led to the rise of liberal ideals of democracy. The availability to the bourgeoisie the resources for the creation of institutions such as newspapers, debating societies, libraries, coffee houses, publishing enterprises and literary societies, universities and museums, and other such public system of institutions which became democratic pillars in the true spirit, that political awakening and public opinion, could be formed. The bourgeois developed their own voice, and Habermas says they thereby began to develop into a critical audience (Peters, 1993: 552). Access to private spaces of the elite ruling class, which were the domain of the limited, was opened to the ordinary people, who were hitherto restricted to participate, and access to them was almost free due to the rising influence of capitalism, costs were no longer prohibitive for commoners too, the public sphere thus, grew tremendously in size and influence.

Structural Transformation has recently been widely criticized and reformulated with change in the political economy of the media (Calhoun, 1992; Dahlgren, 1991; Fraser, 1992; Habermas, 1992; Keane, 1991a; Schudson, 1992) with the argument that the newspapers which were

crucial to Habermas' conceptualization were tools of propaganda for the bourgeoise and the middle class rather than the embodiment of rationality that was disinterested and they were challenged by other competing newspapers and periodicals which vouched to be the real voice of the class of people who were actually excluded from the process of political rights. Curran argues that eighteenth century press as pointed out by Habermas was not as emancipatory as it looked. It was marred by infighting, corruption, and extreme ideological fights marked their existence all throughout the century- something which was far removed from the idealized portrayal of the eighteenth-century press by Habermas which according to him was the embodiment of ideal discourse of private individuals. Thomas Murphy (2005) contends that Habermas's formulation of the concept of the public sphere was intended from the beginning to be controversial (pg. 164).

Another observation on the Habermasian concept made by Curran (1991a) all throughout the eighteenth to the twentieth century press has in reality never been free, it has always been under some or the other kind of political control from vested interests which have always understood the importance of press to political processes. This contradicts the situation as explained by Habermas his theorization of the early press which he postulated as the rational thought process of the bourgeoisie and an ongoing platform of discussion for the private citizens of the state, and the contradiction with the press at later times as an agency of manipulation, dictated by the intent of collective politics. He argues that the characterization is misleading in case of the contemporary media as an agency of manipulation and is not in consonance with the realities of the press in eighteenth century. Since Habermas stresses a deliberative, not merely informed public, this in consequence may be a less valid criticism of Habermas than of the current media practices (Haas, 2004: 80).

Craig Calhoun (1992) has pointed out that Habermas is too taken up by the ideals of the liberal bourgeoisie and their formulation that the public sphere is only a space to which citizens converge and form opinion on matters, and thus in the process neglecting the idea of political movements, social unrests and uprisings. Calhoun says social movements are actually important for a democratic space to flourish as it brings to the centre issues which are of importance to public discourse. Habermas is also clearly interested in the public sphere as different from "representational" publicity. He considered the public presence of kings, lords, and the ruling class to represent a public that was highly inaccessible to the masses, and barred the public from participation in the government and thus not public at all. Although they could do more than "gaze stupidly on the spectacle of the Lords and Kings," they had no practical access to public life (Peters, 1993: 547). Nancy Fraser (1992) brings in the idea of women being excluded from the public space and thus pushing the issue of gender into the private space. For her, Habermas's idea of the public sphere is an exclusionary space which has historically been a masculine form of the public sphere, excluding in the process minorities such as gays, lesbians and people of colour.

2.4.1 Public Sphere Model

The public sphere model posits the public as co-participants in the production of media texts and equal owners of the media resource. "One of the most useful things about the concept of the public sphere is the explicit place it gives to media and modes of communication as central to political life in all varieties" (Peters, 2003: 1). The public sphere model refuses to see the public as mere consumers of media products, or as public waiting to passively receive information from the top; rather, in the public sphere model, the public are active as users and producers of

media. The public sphere model demands active participation from the public and is also potentially rewarding for the public and for individuals. The public sphere model is also the most constrained and limited by the dominant market logic of neoliberalism and capitalism. As Habermas says the rational, open discursive practices and discussion of the time created the perfect conditions for the public sphere to operate and function as thought, and the media contributed to this open discussion of ideas by encouraging free dissemination and criticism of opinions and ideas.

Therefore this approach to broadcasting is characterized by ideas such as participatory culture, citizen journalism, dialogic engagement amongst communities or social movements, and social or community ownership of the means of media production and distribution. These efforts are an attempt to make consumers into citizens and return the idea of public discourse as a corporate analogy from the public relations managers to those who really own them- citizens. The public sphere model values dialogue and negotiation in the self-governance of society (McCauley *et al.*, 2000: xxiv).

As we discovered in a number of instances in which organizations attempt to "seed" a public, where such compromises are more prevalent than anomalous (Fish *et al.*, 2011). These compromises become even more evident and stark through ethnographic and historical analysis of commercial media organizations experimenting with the idea of public sphere model.

2.4.2 Press as Political Public Sphere

All criticism granted, the importance of public sphere cannot be discounted as a legitimate source of media analysis. According to

Garnham (1992), criticism hurled at the theory has a basis as well and have historically been the basis for further refinement of the concept according to changing times. Elsewhere, Garnham (1990) has argued that the original theory can be used to be a historical measurement against which to judge present day social arrangements and the Habermasian principle represents an ideal situation which can be strived to be emulated. Mouffe (1992) says any idea of a public sphere must take into account the large number of opposing voices present in oppositional discourse, and the complexity of the resulting power structure...these conflicts are not contrary to working democracy, but rather, they are central to the current understanding of political participation (pg. 757).

Schudson (1992: 147) argues that theory forwarded by Habermas acts not so much as the measurement of change rather acts as a category to understand the importance of political critique, '...offers nevertheless a powerful and arresting vision of the role of media in a democratic society, and in this sense its historical status is irrelevant.' Habermas himself has argued, to be workable under the contemporary societal situation public sphere is achievable only when it is exercised under a reoriented social and political order where it is under the control of organizations that are politically opposed to each other and are committed to the idea of protecting the public sphere both in society and in their relation to each other (Garnham, 1990). According to Dahlgren (1991: 2)

> The concept of the public sphere can be used in a very general and common sense manner, as, for example, a synonym for the processes of public opinion or for the news media themselves. In its more ambitious guise, as it was developed by Juergen Habermas, the public sphere should be understood as an analytical category, a conceptual device which, while pointing to a specific social phenomenon can also aid us in analyzing and researching the phenomenon. ...As an analytical category, the bourgeois public sphere consists of a dynamic nexus which links a variety of actors, factors and contexts together in a cohesive theoretical

framework. It is this configurational quality, with its emphasis on institutional and discursive contingencies which give the concept its analytical power.

Structural Transformation received immense criticism and in response to some of those, Habermas (1992: 451) now focuses on the idea of the *political public sphere* as an important means for democratic theory. He deliberates on the notion of the formation of the constitutionally ratified political will of the people or rather electoral democracy which is aided by a media that is uncorrupted by the influence of power, which he formulates as 'deliberative democracy' and is a theoretical reality for Habermas in a constitutionally safeguarded electoral process. And this process leads to the formation of a public sphere which tends to depend on the process of problem solving rather than decision making.

Habermas argues that this theorization of the *political public sphere* is the ultimate form of public representation and fulfils all aspirations of the public that are under it, the media too on its part fulfills all the conditions that it is supposed to, as a space which becomes the platform for the formation of ideas and opinions for the masses who are the citizen of that particular state. Thus this theory forms the definitive base for the functions of a democratic state. The existence of the *political public sphere* requires the constitutional safeguards that the nation state provides. Habermas says 'it also needs the supportive spirit of cultural traditions and patterns of socialization, of the political culture, of a populace accustomed to freedom' (1992: 453). In summary, the main characteristics of the theory of the public sphere, and media's role in it, as Curran (1991b: 83) says:

> From (Habermas's) work can be extrapolated a model of a public sphere as a neutral zone where access to relevant information affecting the public good is widely available, where discussion is free from

domination by the state and where all those participating in public debate do so on an equal basis. Within this public sphere, people collectively determine through the process of rational argument the way in which they want to see society develop, and this shapes in turn the conduct of government policy. The media facilitates this process by providing an arena of public debate, and by reconstructing private citizens as public body in the form of public opinion.

2.5 Liberal Democratic Tradition and Role of the Press

In its original conceptualization by Habermas, the public sphere theory is strongly based on the liberal-democratic theory though striving to go beyond it. As Dahlgren (1991: 3) puts it: "...one could see that with its emphasis on democracy and the role of the media, Habermas's notion of the public sphere actually has a good deal in common with prevailing liberal thought in Anglo-American traditions. At the same time, the concept has ambition beyond those developed within the traditions of liberal democratic theory, of which his analysis also in part presents itself as a critique."

Liberal democratic theory describes a political process whereby the various groups, and individuals, of society articulate their opinions and views in terms of demands on societal properties, the formulation of common significant goals and active participation in policy formulation for the achievement of these legitimate demands and goals. A precondition to this argument is the essential presence of western society imitated political institutions; importantly, universal suffrage, parliamentary democracies and multiple political parties. The success of these institutions in such ideal situations is mainly seen as the source of political legitimacy. This type of constitutional legitimacy implies that

power lies with the masses, a power exercised through the power of suffrage.

For any government to be considered truly democratic, therefore, it must be a national government chosen by a democratic polity on the basis of a constitutionally backed elections; that is where legitimacy in exercising power and in execution of leadership is mediated through the power of the ballot-box by a fully enfranchised universal suffrage, and where the articulation of political thoughts occur through a multi-party democracy which reflects the true plural character of such a social order.

There is a basic socio-theoretical argument about media and about politics and the relation between the two. The concern is based on particular assumptions about the social and economic systems within which the media functions. The literature cited shows that media have become an integral part of a network of institutions in society and they are largely responsible to provide meaning to the relationships between such institutions in a political system. Because of their resultant economic bias, media have become embedded in the political system that it inhabits so much so it is hard to differentiate the two and political activity becomes integral to media systems and vice versa. This is important in understanding the idea of opinion formation, the propagation of dominant ideologies, and political legitimacy.

It is obvious that the notion of a press that is intrinsically involved in the democratic process has roots in the liberal democratic theory. From a communication perspective, liberal democratic theory (Keane 1991, McQuail, 1987, 1991; Skogerbo, 1991) puts at premium the idea of supremacy of the individual, the belief in logic, progress and the unflinching sovereignty of the popular opinion. This theory postulates freedom for the individual in both the symbolic and the material realm; the freedom to hold and express opinion and ideas through the press

without risking persecution and to willfully own and use means of publication without curbs or interference from government. The normative aspect of liberal-democratic theory posits a centrifugal role for the press in the democratic political process. It says that mass media should play a pivotal part in making the relevant information and ideas and views and ideals publicly available and in providing the spaces in which such argument and policy proposals can be debated and discussed, so people can make informed choices in their capacity as citizens (McQuail, 1987; 1992; Murdock 1991; Curran, 1991a).

Press freedom in the liberal democratic tradition harps on private ownership and free market principles. Among functions, the free press should: be a kind of relater of dissent or political opposition, be a citizen's first wall of defence against probable misrule, and a means of arriving at the common truth. The argument is that free public expression of all competing ideas is the means to see the truth and the only means to avert falsities. "The nearest approximation to truth will emerge from the competitive exposure of alternative viewpoints and progress for society will depend on the choice of 'right' over 'wrong solutions" (McQuail, 1987: 113; Siebert *et al.* 1956).

The historical rise of media in the west as a medium of mass communication was met with opposition and hostility among the ruling elite (Curran and Seaton, 1991; McQuail, 1991; Negrine, 1989: 50). Regulation of the press was exercised upon the grounds that too much freedom of the press was a threat and destabilizing influence on the security and even existence of the state. Also, the media were seen as a potential new threat to the established power order of the day. Thus any plea for freedom of the press was practically arguments against these controls.

Freedom of the press from state control was presumably closely linked to the development of and spread of parliamentary politics. This was further linked to the demise of the empire and colonies of the western states and growing opposition to the authoritarian rule. Freedom of expression for the public meant freedom from state control, which implied freedom to express a political choice and resultantly make that choice. The idea of the fourth estate was suspiciously viewed as the need to curb the excésses of the power of the authoritarian state. The modern ideas were envisaged, a press which was a watchdog, a keeper of the conscience of the government and also taking governments to task and representing the public interest. But this role of the press is never without its limitations.

2.6 Democracy Model

The democracy model in its agenda states that democracies should promote democracy inducing practices like investigative journalism and revelation of facts to the public which are deemed important to the cause of the society. This clearly means that the purpose of the state should be to manage media resources importantly for the promotion and upkeep of democracy. This directly would mean an emphasis on the public sphere and guardianship models and a minimum influence of the impact of the commercial model of media. Moving over the public resource model and inclusive of the technology model, the democracy model argues that the democratic state should advocate for pro-democracy practices.

> Has nothing to do with scarcity of resources or an abundance of technology. It is much more fundamental than that. The founders of public service broadcasting...said that democracy needs a healthy nonprofit, non-commercial media sector. That's the core issue involved here. You can't have a democracy without having a healthy, democratic

media system. ... That scarcity stuff was something lawyers and politicians cooked up later, to sell public broadcasting to legislators, judges, and bureaucrats. You can't get people off their butts on the scarcity thing. You organize a movement on the vision of democratic media, not all this talk about gigabytes in the spectrum (McChesney, 2003: 16).

Only a radical democratization of the media systems will bring about appropriate and helpful mediated public deliberation that does as Habermas suggested it should: fill the space between civil society and the state (Haas, 2004: 181).

2.6.1 Democratic Press and its Economic Limitations

The strongest theoretical arguments about the limitations of the role of the media in the democratic process and in democratic institutions are rooted in Marxism. According to Fiske (1987: 254):

> Marxist assumptions ... start form the belief that meaning and the making of them (which together constitute culture) are indivisibly linked to the social structure and can only be explained in terms of that structure and its history. Correlatively, the social structure is held in place by, among other forces, the meanings that culture produces...

On the basis of such ideas and arguments, classical Marxist perspectives dwell on ownership issues of the means of material production held by the capitalist class and the thus unequal distribution of wealth and property in society. The capital centric industrial order is seen as having produced a class divided society where a group of bourgeois minority class hold power. Following Marx, it is argued that the ruling class which controlled the material means of production also held sway over the means of psychological production and distribution, including

the media. Thus, the ideas of the ruling class are the overwhelming dominant ideas of the epoch. This is the postulation that was articulated by Marx and Engels in the *German Ideology*:

> The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e. the class, which is the ruling material force in society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal has the control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. ...The individuals composing the ruling class possess among other things consciousness, and therefore think... hence among other things (that they) rule also as producers of ideas, and regulate the production and distribution of the ideas of their age: thus their ideas are the ruling ideas of the epoch (1998: 136-137).

From this theoretical assumption, private ownership of the media of mass communication belongs to the capitalist class. Because of their own personal and commercial capitalist interests, they are supposed to by default to use their power and control to ensure that, the media they own and so blatantly wield influence on carry dominant ideological messages in the interests of the ruling capitalist class. A more subtle and refined view of economic determinism argues that the communication industries taken together bolster the general interests of the capitalist class, or of dominant factions within it (Murdock, 1982: 141). Other thinkers of the Frankfurt school make a contribution in detail by giving reasons for the failure of revolutionary upheaval; resulting in the overthrow of capitalism as theorized and predicted by Karl Marx. Market forces in collusion with the culture industry (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1944), which in the process of reinventing culture for sale defeats its basic oppositional purpose, is ostensibly blamed for this failure. The media which acts as a vehicle for culture, ends up being just a mechanism for containment of change, a

function which twisted the fundamental economic revolution that was predicted by Marx.

The political process itself is mode of struggles for power and dominance. At another level Marxist thinkers argue that a ruling class will always ensure that information dissemination and ideological bias legitimize their hold on power. In liberal democratic theories, however, this power is with the electorate through the ballot box. Media today based on these arguments can be said to use media as tool for political campaign and propagator of ideologies and beliefs.

The media is seen therefore as pivotal in preserving the status quo in that as the carrier of the ruling dominant class ideology that celebrated 'technological rationality, consumerism, short term gratification, and the myth of 'classlessness" (McQuail, 1987: 65), it has served to perpetuate and elevate the economic base by subjugating and assimilating the proletariat class. The commercialized and homogenous mass culture was the chief source of legitimacy through which this success for monopoly capital had been achieved. Politics, therefore naturally from the above arguments, as mediated by media content is serving the preserve of the capitalist class.

For the public to be part of the democratic process, they must necessarily depend on the media for information and commentary. Again, for politicians it is the media that disseminates their divergent views to the wider mass. Thus, media becomes a potential site of conflict and an arena for political struggle. Those who have power and access to the media may want to have their views given biased treatment and those of their opponents constricted. A more used approach is to present ideologically slanted messages as if they were objective reality, propaganda in the garb of reality.

In complex situations and in modern day structures ownership does not always translate directly into control, nor where control always also determines the nature of the content, structural analysis becomes important to understand the complex relationship between the two as put by Marxist political economists:

> Analysis at this level is focused not on the interests and activities of capitalists, but on the structure of the capitalist economy and its underlying dynamics... it does not matter who the key owners and controllers are. What is important is their location in the general economic system and the constraints and limits that it imposes on their range of feasible options (Murdock, 1982: 127).

As Hall argues how media institutions although under a dominant ideology still functions with free conscience of its own and the options it has that 'could... be used to demonstrate how media institutions could be articulated to the production of dominant ideologies, while at the same time being 'free' of direct compulsion, and 'independent' of any direct attempt by the powerful to gobble it' (1982: 86).

2.7 Pluralist Determination of Press Performance

At the other end of the theoretical spectrum, pluralists dwell on the declining influence and control of the dominant capitalist class and of ownership as a seed source of power. In this school of thought, significant and effective control over the tools of production is believed to have passed over to those who directly commanded and wielded the necessary novel technologies and organizations. Murdock (1982: 128-135) provides a summary of this approach. From this perspective, it is believed that it was the salaried professional class of the new world order who were seen to emerge as the new power group. This development was seen as a result

of the rise of large share holding companies. Legal ownership of such new world order organization was seen as a result, to have divided among a large group of shareholders. These new shareholder class who held the control of the company in a complex mix of divided ownership tended to be 'absentee owners' leaving the task of supervising day to day running to professional managers specifically hired for the purpose (Murdock, 1982: 130).

The media industry was very much affected by this sudden change in trajectory in industrial organization. Newspaper ownership became less concentrated and it spread to a large number of shareholders and scale of newspaper organization increased tremendously with increase in readers. As these changes came into effect, more and more owners-proprietor who controlled organizations gave up their control over operations to full time editors and managers. Thus, all powerful owners once, are seen as having been now relegated to people who merely become the means by which the editors and managers exercise their power and gain legitimacy too. With such a change in the structure managerialists have stressed the relative impotence of owners and their autonomy of administrative and professional personnel (Murdock, 1982: 128).

Alongside such kind of editorship view of shared responsibility is a pluralist conception of power. According to Murdock (1982: 129):

> Where Marxists insist that the capitalist class is still the most significant power bloc within advanced capitalism, pluralists regard it as one elite among a number of others composed of leading personnel from the key institutional spheres-parliamentary, the military, the civil service, and so on. These elites are seen as engaged in a constant competition to extend their influence and advance their interests, and although some may have an edge at particular times or in particular situations, none has a permanent advantage. Hence, instead of seeing the effective owners of the communication corporations as pursuing the interests of the

dominant capitalist class..., pluralists see the controllers of the various cultural industries as relatively autonomous power blocs competing with other significant blocs in society, including the financial and industrial elites.

This pluralist notion of power structure in a press organization rises from the economic idea of laissez-faire or liberal market model of the modern economy. As postulated by Murdock, just as there is the race for power and control between institutional entities, so media organizations have to compete for the holy grail of their existence i.e. attention and loyalty of the audience in the market. In the ultimate analysis it is the demands and concerns of the consumers or audience that determines the quality of products that such organization finally supply to the market. Similarly, the managers and editors are not all powerful as thought to be; their actions and decisions are subject to scrutiny of the market forces or so to say the consumers that they cater to.

As is obvious from the preceding arguments liberal theorist abhor the idea of government or state ownership of any kind of media. Even state patronage of media institutions and tools is discouraged because it is believed to be the starting point of government and official domination. It is arguably opined that private ownership of the commercial model kind of the media is the only sure guarantee in ideal circumstances of freedom of the press and of free expression for the people. It follows then the idea that private citizen of the state who so wishes is free to own the media like any other business interests and use it to express private political view one holds. The success or failure of such an enterprise would entirely depend on the ability to produce a profit making organization like other businesses do and this in turn will be justified by the editors' ability to cater to the demands of the consumers. Logically speaking, citizenry would be the final judges of what type of media existed (Siebert *et al.*, 1956).

From such an argument perspective, the political and media scene is seen as a market place of ideas. All views should be given the opportunity to compete in it (Curran 1991b; Habermas, 1989; Negrine, 1989; Siebert *et al.*, 1956). The public or the audience will choose the idea that is closer to their idea and belief cultivated again through the dissemination of views from media itself. They would identify with and express themselves by buying the media, which carried what to them constituted the idea of truth or closely resembled that idea. Advertisers too would be attracted by the concept of the media that receives public legitimacy and acceptable to the widest audience possible which in turn would mean wider publicity for their products.

2.8 Ideology, Class and Hegemony

The concept of ideology, according to Larrain (1983) has metamorphosed to the level that it has lost out on most of its original and critical meaning. He observes that in its original form by Karl Marx, ideology is both that process and end product, by purely discursive means, of providing answers to life's real issues and contradictions. The ideological forms of consciousness as said by Marx conceal the existence and character of these inbuilt contradictions, which are naturally seen to be inherent in capitalist social formations. These misrepresentations as he calls it or ideological distortions lead to the creation of the same conditions of oppression. Marx used ideology as a means of both criticism of capitalism and also nature of its distorting element. It can be inferred therefore that ideology according to Marx's formulation is a narrow conceptualization that applies to those distortions of reality which are related to the masking of a contradictory or distorted reality.

The neutral versions of the concept of ideology slowly came to replace the Marxian original negative connotation. Gradually what became the standard accepted conceptualization was the interpretation of ideology as an all encompassing superstructural sphere in which men acquire consciousness of their contradictory social relations (Gramsci, 1971: 138).

According to Larrain (1983: 222) it came from Lenin's further elaboration of the concept of ideology. He observes that:

> For Lenin, ideology becomes the political consciousness linked to the interests of various classes and, in particular the opposition between bourgeois and socialist ideology... Ideology is no longer a necessary distortion which conceals contradictions but becomes a neutral concept referring to the political consciousness of classes, including the proletarian class.

With Gramsci, the above conceptualization of Lenin on ideology became a realm of struggle for hegemonic control. Gramsci (1971: 377) considers ideology as being much more than a system of ideas, it refers also to a capacity to inspire attitudes and provide directions for action. Ideology plays role of 'the terrain in which men move, acquire consciousness of their position, struggle, etc.' It is through ideology only that a class can exercise hegemony over others.

Althusser (2008) points out that 'the reproduction of the submission to the ruling ideology' requires the formation and presence of stable institutions like that of the Church, the mass media and the political institutions. He calls these institutions, whether or not they are strictly organized by the state, 'ideological state apparatuses'. Because the world of ideologies is not simple but complex structures and comprises simply not of dominant ideas but of a field of ideological themes, Althusser says what the ideological state apparatuses create must be the ruling ideology

exactly inverse in its proposition. Ideological reproduction thus becomes' not only the stake but also the site of class struggle...' (Hall, 1977: 336).

The idea of struggle for hegemony is used to explain the phenomena how the ruling class or dominant groups propagate their interests in a subtle way projecting their ideas as the prevailing, common sense view (White, 1992). According to Gramsci, in modern times, a class or social group maintains its ideological dominance not simply because it uses force which is barely exercised but because it also exerts an intellectual leadership and makes compromises, with a variety of allies who are unified in a social bloc (Sassoon, 983: 201-203). The exercise of hegemony thus depends on a combination of force and consent (Hall, 1977: 332).

2.9 Political Economy

From the arguments laid out in this chapter it is clear that media systems have developed according to change in the structure of economic and political institutions. The ideal situation hardly exists and all media systems have led towards the commercial model of media systems. Other models which were answers to the need of Third world countries like the Development model have also been appropriated in the new economic order. In the political economy of media world the production of media products is focused toward the making of profit.

Audiences historically have been deemed to be passive consumers who have to be fed with information that suit their purpose and development needs. The public service institutions are a case in point where such experiments were undertaken. In case of such public broadcasters, the-audience-as-public model defines audiences as a needy mass that require the services of public television programmes in order to

improve their living conditions, where information was treated as the prerogative of the government. Political economy is concerned with the functions of production, distribution, and consumption of the products of television stations and how these are associated with audiences' vis-à-vis their need for survival in social life (Mosco, 1996: 17).

In the public service ethos, media houses are already suffused with an assumption of knowing all than [the audience] what they [want] or [need] (Scannell, 1996: 11). [Television, hence its audiences] are not just constructs; they are invisible fictions produced in the studio rooms of television stations who decide what is that needs to be produced institutionally in order for various institutions to take charge of the mechanisms of their own survival (Hartley, 1989: 227).

Political economy exclaims that other discourses of power as well, also relating to the socio-cultural which are also at play in the moments of the audiences' interaction with television messages (Mosco, 1996). When these other 'powerful discourses momentarily sideline the exertion of power over the audience by the ideologically circumscribed television content, then aberrant readings of programmes' happen (Fiske, 1987).

Thus, in this chapter I have looked at the existing arguments on how media systems have formulated and re-formulated their messages according to changing times. In the context of my study these theoretical lens will be used to look at the empirical data on the state of media in Assam. Assam is a state with a lot of media activity; print media has existed in Assam since mid-nineteenth century, and has played an important role in the formation of the contours of the Assamese nation. The Assamese language has seen immense change because of the influence of print media which actually, was in turn the result of the first printing press' arrival in Sivasagar, Assam. In the next chapter I look at

this historic turn in events and the role of Assamese press in the modern Assamese history.

Chapter three

Missionaries, *Orunodoi* and the Agitation

I have divided this chapter broadly into three parts, the advent of the American Missionaries into Assam, the arrival of the printing press and the initiation of literary activities, like the first Assamese print journal *Orunodoi*, secondly, the role of the press in the Assam agitation days and thirdly how press in Assam evolved during the post-agitation period. Any historical analysis on the growth of the press in Assam cannot be complete without a mention of the contribution of the missionaries to Assamese language and consciousness. I have selected the three epochs to understand the growth of journalism and journalistic activities in nineteenth century Assam to late twentieth century post-agitation evolution of the press. These three divisions are by no means a comprehensive list of events, and only have been applied keeping in mind the objectives of this study.

3.1 The Advent of Missionaries in Assam

The American Baptist Missionaries, who made Assam their field of evangelical activity, had an important role to play in the collective life of the Assamese people. It was the role of resuscitation of the Assamese Language from a ban in administrative and educational matters and its culture as a medium of expression. As a result of the treaty of Yandaboo in 1826, which was signed by the British and the Burmese, Assam became officially part of the territories of the East India Company. By

1836 the British had made Bengali as the language to be followed as medium of instruction and also in administrative practices.

The colonial history of Assam, as is similar to other such histories, was marked by the imposition of whimsical decisions that had grave effect on the development of Assamese identity per se. The British rule saw the irony of losing to Bengali language even in Assamese speaking regions. Education in schools was in the Bengali medium. The colonized, enthused by nationalistic zeal, often make efforts to distinguish their manners and customs, religious and social institutions, and culture and civilization. In Assam the struggle to carve an identity, language of its own was marked by the exemplary efforts of the missionaries along with like minded individuals who by their hard work established Assamese as a language with its own specific grammar. Resistance to the imposition of a new culture is nothing new in the dichotomy of colonialism and the colonized.

In the history of decolonization, intellectuals and activists fought against colonial rule and defied the notions of nation, language and race that were continually being revised and thrown at them. Ironically, Miles Bronson and the Baptist missionaries, who were brought by the British colonialists to serve their imperialistic interests in Assam, were the pioneers in resisting the dominant discourses of language and nation that was defined by the narrow interests of the Britishers. "Apart from bringing out an issue of *Orunodoi* every month, the Baptist crew continued to publish a number of religious tracts (including Brown's fresh translation of the New Testament), 'a number of elementary books for Schools', a translation of the Indian Penal Code, and a Vocabulary and Phrase Book which claimed to reflect the 'authentic Assamese spirit'" (Kar, 2008: 40).

The British annexation of Assam in 1826 was not as momentous an event in Assam's history as the ones that followed the political occupation. In the new colonial regime, David Scott[10] employed former officials of the Ahom[11] kings in the revenue and judicial departments, but their lack of expertise and unfamiliarity with the new system made them unfit to man the lower echelons of the administrative apparatus.

They had to gradually make room for men from outside Assam, especially from Bengal. Bengali clerks then poured into Assam seeking employment in the newly-established government offices. Since Bengali was the official language adopted by the British for the administration of the Bengal Presidency and also the mother tongue of the Bengali clerks working under the British in Assam, it was considered economically most convenient by the colonial rulers to enforce Bengali both as the official language and as the medium of instruction in the so called vernacular medium schools of Assam.

Among the cultural characteristics of nationality, language is, and has always been, pre-eminent. In forming and sustaining a nationality, language is the chief factor. That loyalty to one's national state, and pride in one's language and belief in its intrinsic excellence play a supremely significant role in defining one's nationalistic spirit, was exemplified by Bronson.

A strong allegiance to one's own linguistic group, which was earlier absent in the Assamese society, was achieved through Bronson's campaign – a demonstration of a truly nationalistic spirit. "Reportedly the first wordbook of Assamese, the manuscript contains three parallel

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[10] David Scott was made the Commissioner of Assam after Assam became part of the British Empire.
[11] The Ahoms originally from Tai descent ruled Assam from 1228 to 1826. The invasion by the Burmese and consequently Treaty of Yandaboo in 1826 between the Burmese and the Britishers ended the 600 years rule of the Ahoms.

columns of words classed as 'Sanskrit', *'Ashami Bhasha'*[12] and *'Camarupa Bhasha'*[13]. Even if we believe that *'Ashami Bhasha'* refers to the dominant speech of Upper or Eastern Assam (*Ujani*) and *'Camarupa Bhasha'* to that of Lower or Western Assam (*Namani*), no definitive comparison between the two is possible" (Kar, 2008:33) In nineteenth-century India, the emergence of nationalism was closely related to the spread of Western education and rapidly developing means of communication. Unflinching loyalty to one's linguistic or religious group was also considered the genesis of nationalism.

Multiculturalism on Indian soil posed complex problems for social scientists in defining Indian nationalism, and it took the conscious effort of a foreigner like Allan Octavian Hume, a retired British ICS officer, to moot the formation of the Indian National Congress. It was not spontaneous outpourings of deep nationalistic feelings of Indians but a foreigner who brought together the leaders of the Indian intelligentsia on a common platform that led to the formation of the Congress. Similarly, in Assam, Bronson, was instrumental in the process of bringing together a nation based on the idea of a common language. Partha Chatterjee (1993: 05) argues "It (nationalist history) might also tell us that the decade preceding this (formation of Indian National Congress) was a period of preparation, when several provincial political associations were formed. Prior to that, 1820's to the 1870's, was the period of 'social reform,' when colonial enlightenment was beginning to 'modernize' the customs and institutions of a traditional society and the political spirit was still very much that of collaboration with the colonial regime: nationalism had still not emerged." It is in this light that the advent of missionaries and their institutions should be viewed in the context of Assam. The history of nationalism is replication of the history of Europe to the colonial societies

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[12] The dialect of Assamese spoken in the eastern part of Assam
[13] The dialect of Assamese spoken in the western part of Assam

too. And the arrival of press, language and modernity is just a part in that 'modular form' of nationalism served up by the west.

The Assamese intelligentsia was, therefore, in no way alone in its espousal of the cause of regional nationalism; the focal point for the Assamese intellectuals at that time were the existence of Assam as a separate nation with its own cultural tradition, language and religion. Bronson[14] leading the language movement was a rare example of a missionary's direct involvement in the social affairs of Assam.

The agitation was definitely a manifestation of nationalism as it gave vent to the simmering discontent at least among educated elites like Anandaram Dhekial Phukan[15]. "The British-owned and nationalist press were closely associated with the freedom struggle, presenting and countering contending versions of issues of the day. The rapidly growing newspapers introduced and consolidated ideas of modernity, and contributed to the evolution of a national identity, despite low literacy and strict press laws introduced by the colonial administration" (Sonwalkar, 2002:823). And *Orunodoi* was one such journal which served that purpose. Bronson's missionary career, if measured by the number of converts he gathered, could not be called successful, and he finally had to shift base to the hills of Meghalaya where he finally found success in his missionary goals.

We may presume that failure to resolve conflicts at the religious level with the Brahmins led Bronson to another method of interaction with the common people, and as a result, the consciousness of direct participation in any form of national uprising against the colonial government might

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[14] Miles Bronson was one of the first missionaries who came to Assam in 1838 for their evangelical activity. He also brought along with him a printing press, the first in the region.
[15] Assamese youths from wealthy families would go to Calcutta for their education, and thus it became the center of Assamese intellectual class in the nineteenth century.

not have dawned upon him, if he considered the language movement as a manifestation of linguistic nationalism.

Regeneration of the Assamese language and culture definitely did not occupy the first place on the missionary's list of priorities, for evangelization work challenged him to limitless scope and opportunities. At this juncture, it will be appropriate to remember Bronson and his origins. Baptist missionaries had a legacy of nurturing republican and egalitarian ideas and their origins were, at best, anything but extraordinary.

As dissenters, they had been excluded at home from most opportunities for advancement and exposed to radical political views. From time to time the authorities in India made it clear that they regarded them as politically dangerous, and people of conservative inclinations saw the endeavor, particularly by dissenters of low social status and with suspect political opinion, to convert Hindus to Christianity as inherently seditious and likely to lead to tumult and insurrection. Colonial rulers saw them as a threat to the British empire.

The dangers anticipated as a result of the missionary work of the Baptists and others were greatly exaggerated. They did arouse some minor controversies with their aggressive preaching and polemical pamphlets attacking the religious beliefs of Hindus and Muslims, but they never posed a serious threat to law and order, nor were they enough to justify any charge of sedition. The Baptist missionaries allied themselves with progressive Hindus, such as Rammohun Roy[16], on a number of issues of social reform and also engaged in various theological debates with them. They tended to distinguish between Hindu religion which they wished to destroy or write off as false idolatry. Indian cultures which they

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[16] Rammohun Roy was the founder of Brahmo Samaj, a reformist organization. He was considered to be the father of 'Bengal Renaissance'.

regarded as, in many ways, excellent; and Indian society which, they believed, required radical reform to make it conform to Christian or western ethics.

In Bengal, the missionaries were convinced that only Christianity could provide a secure foundation for true patriotism. In Assam, Bronson's Christian ideas about the uplift of the marginalized and oppressed sections of society spurred him on in an endeavor that was divorced from purely missionary pursuits.

Whereas Alexander Duff[17] saw Christianity as the panacea for all ills in India and sought to introduce it for instilling patriotic feelings, Bronson's idea of inculcating nationalism into the natives of Assam differed greatly from Duff's. He did not stress Christianity first, before he could step into agitations like the language restoration. Linguistic nationalism and ideas pertaining to it were the birthright of any citizen of any state – Christian or otherwise.

Bronson, on this issue, made no demarcations between Christians and non-Christians. He did not wait for the conversion of key individuals or the gradual percolation of Christian ideas to the natives. For him, moral and spiritual enlightenment were of least significance and even the triumph of Christianity assumed secondary importance at this juncture. To awaken the natives of Assam from their slumber, Bronson could not wait for them to become Christians.

Bronson's Christian ideas were to instill into people love for and pride in their language, and this he sought to do, even though they were not Christians. Missionaries' actions have more often than not met with criticisms. "The language of the 864-page Assamese Bible, with all its painful struggles to maintain a precarious balance between dead Sanskrit

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[17] Duff was a Scottish Missionary who came to Calcutta in early nineteenth century and established institutes of higher learning like the Scottish Church College.

and living speeches, was too much of a product of the linguistic laboratory at Serampore[18] to strike any ready chord of familiarity or belongingness in Assam" (Kar, 2008:34). William Carey's attempt at translating the Bible into Assamese without knowing the nuances of the language, and trying to export experimental Assamese from Srerampore as the language of the people flopped. A single language through the Bible was not successful. There is a tendency in certain quarters to deny that the missionaries had anything to do with colonial powers and to lay too much stress on the so-called religious neutrality of the British administration.

While the missionary support for colonialism and its commercial and political interests retarded the progress of Christianity in India, Bronson's involvement in social issues might partly be the retarding factor in his not very successful missionary career; but at the same time it became the cause of his contribution to linguistic regeneration in Assam, especially his making the Assamese take pride in their own language in the Brahmaputra Valley.

Bronson's participation in the language regeneration process led to Assamese being again recognized as a distinct identity of the Assamese people, for which Bronson continues to be remembered. "By the early years of the 1830s, the idea of gathering the local speeches in Assam into a distinct category of Assamese was deemed unrewarding in the official circle" (Kar, 2008:35). In this context the relevance of Bronson's achievement cannot be ruled out.

Modernisation that was brought in by the British administrators and Western missionaries in the nineteenth century ushered in social consciousness in Assam. Assertion of tribal identity has become stronger

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[18] Srerampore in Bengal served as the headquarters of the American Baptist Missionaries in the eastern part of India in the nineteenth century, and established the Mission press here.

during the post-colonial period. A situation, which has been termed the birth pangs of a new social order, has arisen in Assam where there is heightened political consciousness among every ethnic group with little readiness to concede anything to others.

3.2 The *Orunodoi*

Orunodoi[19], as is suggestive of the name was the most important literary achievement of nineteenth century Assamese society. Referred to as 'The Dawn' in English it proclaimed its motto to be as 'devoted to Religion, Science and General Intelligence.' Nineteenth century Assam was marked by an intellectual movement and Assamese youths of aristocratic families went to Calcutta for their studies. "Calcutta also became the cradle of Assamese literary activities in the second half of the nineteenth century. The '*Jonaki* Age', a glorious chapter in the history of Assamese literature, had its origin in Calcutta. ...Even Boli Narayan Borah and Benudhar Sharmah have said that almost throughout the nineteenth century, government services were manned by competent Assamese of good (aristocratic) families without taking into account any academic qualifications. Competition for jobs on the basis of English education developed at a later stage. But gradually educated youths, whether Assamese or non-Assamese (mainly Bengali) began to get government jobs that were open to them (Boruah, 1980: 49).

Orunodoi started publication in 1846 from Sivasagar under the editorship of Nathan Brown; and O.T. Cutter was involved with the production processes of the press. "This journal set a new trend in Assamese writing which may broadly be termed as a secular one. Like

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[19] The first Assamese journal published from Sivasagar Mission Press in Assam was started in 1846 and continued till 1880's.

Digdarshan[20] and *Samachar Darpan* in Bengal, *Orunodoi* devoted itself not only to the spread of religious education but also to the progress of 'science and general intelligence'" (Misra, 1985: 1561).The American Mission Press thus became the precursor to the modern thought process in history of the modern Assamese nation. It produced a separate identity for the language by its important publications. "In 1848, Brown published his famous *Grammatical Notices of the Assamese Language*, which not only rejected the official understanding of Assamese as a dialect, but also outlined the theoretical principle on which the identity of the language was to be sought and found" (Kar, 2008: 37). The *Orunodoi* also gave rise to the first journalists in the history of Assam. If Nathan Brown himself was the editor and contributor of articles it was intellectuals and nationalists such as Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, Gunabhiram Baruah and Hemchandra Baruah who by virtue of their contribution to *Orunodoi* became the first generation of journalists from Assam. Although people writing for Bengali journals was prevalent in Calcutta based publications. "Holiram Dhekiyal Phukan, Jaduram Deka Barua, Jajnaram Kharghoria Phukan and Maniram Dewan were among these prominent figures of the Assamese aristocracy who contributed regularly to Bengali journals like *Samachar Darpan, Samachar Chandrika* and *Banga Doot*" (Misra, 1985: 1558)

The publication of *Orunodoi* also led to the publication of other journalistic publications such as *Asam Bandhu* published in 1885 from Nagaon, *Asam Bilasini* published in 1871 from Majuli, Asam News published in 1885 from Guwahati, *Asam Darpan* published in 1874 from Tezpur, *Asam Mihir* published from Guwahati in 1872, *Goalpara Hitashadini* published from Goalpara in 1876 etc. *Jonaki* published in 1889 and *Mau* published in 1886 were two publications which were published in Calcutta by the Assamese intelligentsia there. All these

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[20] *Digdarshan* and *Samachar Darpan* were published from the Srerampore Mission Press. While *Digdarshan* was a monthly in Bengali, *Samachar Darpan* was the first language newspaper published in India in 1818.

newspapers and magazines took inspiration from the contribution of *Orunodoi*. Mainly published in the second half of the nineteenth century they reflected the golden age in Assamese literature.

As is evident from the articles published in the *Orunodoi*, it did not only add to the development of languages, but made its mark on the advent of modernism in Assamese society. Anandaram Dhekial Phukan one of the regular contributors of the journal in his writings time and again had emphasized on the inculcation of scientific temper. Being in Calcutta, he got to know the value of western education and its effect on the masses. He argued for mass education and training in scientific temper. He was impressed by the advancement made by Britain in the field of industry and commerce and had seen from close quarters the kind of impact education was having on Bengal. The Bengal renaissance[21] and its movement against the evil of superstition found mention in the pages of *Orunodoi*. "Not only in the sphere of general education for the masses, but also in relation to the problem of women's education, *Orunodoi* played a leading role in the first half of the nineteenth century. It echoed the spirit of the Bengal Renaissance in this as in many other respects" (Misra, 1985: 1563)

Gunabhiram Barua also wrote on the universalisation of education and after looking at the equality of education in Calcutta, the ideas of Bengal Renaissance that was sweeping across he argued in favour of women's education in Assam too. In fact, the *Orunodoi*, was severe in its criticism of social evils that were prevalent among the Hindu population of the state. *Orunodoi*, although published from missionary press did not limit itself to the religious teachings and as seen on various occasions talked on issues of social relevance, like disease and superstition.

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[21] The Bengal Renaissance was a reformation movement of nineteenth century Bengal that affected the whole country. Intellectual awakening that revolted against religious orthodoxy and conservatism marked the period.

"*Orunodoi* also played a pioneering role in arousing social awareness against some of the prominent social evils prevailing in the Assamese society of the day" (Misra, 1985: 1563). One of the important contributions of *Orunodoi* was its diatribe against the opium consumption in the state. *Orunodoi* gives interesting accounts of the deeply widespread use of *kani* as it is known locally, by the people. It accounts for how people would not work and only look out for *kani*, which would make them lethargic and lazy and was eating the society up. *Orunodoi* thus touched upon a wide variety of issues of local relevance to the people of Assam. The popularity of the journal only went up and it continued with its publication till 1880. The missionaries took extreme pains so that the journal could reach the interior villages of the state and there are incidences of the journal being read out in schools.

The popularity of Srerampore Missions two journals, *Digdarshan* and *Samachar Darpan* in Assam made it seem necessary to have a journal in the language of the natives. That Assam was an important frontier in the expansion plans of the British was evident from the publication of 'The Bible' in 1833 from Srerampore in Assamese. The effort of the missionaries in the legitimate use of the language was exemplary. Later on, from the Mission in Sivasagar, the Mission Press published scores of translation of religious texts into Assamese. By virtue of being stationed at Sivasagar[22], the dialect in use in and around Sivasagar came to be the language used by the press in their publications including the *Orunodoi*. But on the issue of standardization of language there were nationalists who refute the Missionary model of the language and have tried introducing their own version based on Sanskrit rules. Post-1856 after the departure of Nathan Brown, Assamese language activists started to chart their own course for the language. As Bodhisattva Kar says (2008: 46):

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[22] Sivasagar in upper Assam became the center of Missionary publication. The press was set up here and *Orunodoi* and the other books that were printed used the language in use in and around Sivasagar.

"..when Hem Chandra Barua (Hemchunder Shurma) published his *Asamiya Bhashar Byakaran,* the first grammar that was written in 'Assamese'. '[T]he native language is the entrance to the temple of knowledge,' wrote Barua in his English preface to the first edition. The entire book made no allusion to any work by the Baptist missionaries, a gesture strikingly different from Dakeal Phookun's. Indeed, Barua suggestively insisted that there were no 'proper books' in Assamese, that 'by the negligence and ignorance of our people, our language is going through a gradual decay,' and that 'this is the first time the grammar of the Assamese language has been made".

Yet the impact of the missionaries could not be discounted. *Orunodoi* was fashioned after the *Digdarshan* and *Samachar Darshan,* and carried articles on local, national and international issues. It also carried reprints of articles printed in other newspapers published from Bengal that were deemed important for the readers. It received good number of letters as posts which were again published. *Orunodoi* by virtue of its wide variety of articles is an important historical document on the history of the nineteenth century Assam.

Orunodoi can thus be termed as the epitome of excellence of the nineteenth century Assamese intellectual mind. If not for the journalistic writings of people such as Gunabhiram Baruah, Hemchandra Baruah etc., and the zeal of Nathan Brown, *Orunodoi* would not have been successful. Any treatise on Assamese history is incomplete without the mention of the contribution of the journal in shaping the identity of the modern Assamese nation. *Orunodoi* is a classic case of.vindication of Anderson's (1983) argument about the formation of a community based on 'print capitalism'. However thinkers such as Partha Chatterjee have basic doubts on the formulations of the contours of nationalism based on 'modular forms' served up by the modern European states. He (1993: 05) argues "History, it would seem, has decreed that we in the post colonial world shall only be perpetual consumers of modernity. Europe and the

Americas, the only true subjects of history, have thought out on our behalf not only the script of colonial enlightenment and exploitation, but also that of our anticolonial resistance and postcolonial misery. Even our imaginations must remain forever colonized."

The Assamese press continued to play an important role in the history of the independence movement. The long history of the press throughout the nineteenth century changed the press from missionary activity to one with a nationalist agenda. "The press had matured in the acid bath of the freedom struggle, and when India became free in 1947, 'she had already acquired a sophisticated press, experienced in agitation, but also knowledgeable in the arts of the government' (Smith, 1980: 159 cited in Sonwalkar, 2002: 824). After 1880, when the *Orunodoi* stopped publication there was a huge void that was hard to fill. Although dailies had not appeared until 1935, a few weeklies that existed along with *Orunodoi* also stopped after few years. The first daily in Assam was the *Dainik Batori* that was published from Jorhat. Nilomoni Phukon was the editor, and it started functioning on August 12, 1935. It was distributed mainly in the upper Assam region and carried advertisements for most parts. It closed down in 1937. The next daily that emerged was not until 1946 when the *Dainik Asomiya* was published under the editorship of Chandra Kumar Agarwalla. It too closed down in 1949. These dailies played an important role during the freedom struggle. Although press in Assam draws its roots from colonial enterprises, the press revolted against the very source of its existence, the colonial powers. "A notable feature of the Indian press was the speed at which the ideas, tools and processes of modernity were introduced, absorbed and spread across the sub-continent, and then deployed against the very source that had introduced them in the first place: the British colonial system" (Sonwalkar, 2002: 824). In 1949 itself *Notun Asomiya*, another daily was published from Guwahati. *Notun Asomiya* was helmed at various stages by icons of Assamese journalism viz. Debakanta Baruah and Birinchi Kumar Baruah. This newspaper went

on publishing till 1982. The next line of dailies came only after independence, and the major two newspapers were *Dainik Asom* and *Dainik Janmabhoomi* which started publication in 1965 and 1972 respectively. While *Dainik Asom* came out from Guwahati, *Dainik Janmabhoomi* belonged to Jorhat. These next set of newspapers played an active role in the nationalist movements of Assam post-independence, better known as the Assam Agitation.

3.3 Assam Agitation and the Role of Press

Assam has historically been a melting pot of civilizations. The coming of the British into the North East and consequently Assam in the early part of the nineteenth century, and their contribution towards the language and culture of the state was unparalleled.

One of the most important events in the history of Assam was the agitation against the illegal migrants from Bangladesh then known as East Pakistan. And the language issue was at the center of the agitation, popularly known as Assam agitation. The agitationist felt that the Assamese language could soon be wiped out as a result of the large scale migration of Bengali speaking refugees. Most of this fear was historical in nature, as educated Bengalis were preferred by the British to work for them in the tea gardens of Assam. It was Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, a freedom fighter from Assam, who first talked of an Assamese 'nation' and made language the unifying symbol of its modern national consciousness. He also saw it as a member of the family of nationalities that, today, form the Indian Union. (Guha, 1980: 1701)

The language question was always imperative and played out in the consciousness of the middle class Assamese people. In fact, the micro-

nationalism based on language was a distinct movement which arose in opposition to the cultural domination of the Bengali language. As Sanjib Baruah (1994: 654) points out "Assamese micro-nationalism began in the middle of the nineteenth century as an assertion of the autonomy and distinctiveness of Assamese language and culture against the British colonial view of Assam as a periphery of Bengal." The fear of the cultural domination in Assamese society persisted for a long period. The neglect at the hands of the British administration, treatment of the region as an extension of the Bengal province was historical flashpoints. "Assamese also tend to view Bengalis as 'cultural imperialists' who, if given the opportunity, would attempt to assimilate the Assamese, especially since the Bengali language is seen as more 'advanced,' its literary traditions stronger, and its cultural institutions dominating" (Weiner, 1983: 287).

The influence of press in a mass movement such as Assam Agitation was a record of sorts. A very important point to be noted is the idea of language and literacy. Literacy levels were quite low at that time thus what language the people of the state would use for education became a sensitive issue. Many people argue that the whole plot of the agitation was only an urban phenomenon as newspapers had quite limited reach in flaring up the issues in question. Language was at the center of the agitation. "Two key organizations that play a central role in the constitution of Assamese civil society are: the 'Assam Sahitya Sabha'[23] and the 'All Assam Students Union'[24]. That both organizations call themselves 'non-political' is significant in order to understand their location in civil society" (Sanjib Baruah, 1994:665).

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[23] Assam Sahitya Sabha is a literary body founded in 1917, that works for Assamese literature and culture. It plays an important role in the national life of the state and remains an important voice in matters of national relevance

[24] All Assam Students Union is an important students' organization that actively participates in matters relating to state interest. It played an active role during the Assam Agitation (1979-1985).

"It was in sessions of the literary organization the Assam Sahitya Sabha that the call for uniting under the banner of language was first sounded. Historically the question of language always remained pertinent for the state of Assam. That this issue was discussed in the forecourts of the annual events of the Sabha was proof enough of the role of the 'Sabha' as accumulator of public opinion against the hegemonic forces of Bengali domination. It is interesting to note here that the 'Sabha' grew in popularity as it took up the language issue strongly, and its annual sessions held across the state saw lakhs of people visiting it. It was in one such event "while presiding over the annual conference of the Assam Sahitya Sabha in 1927, Tarunram Phukan (1877-1939) said: We, Assamese, are a distinct nationality amongst Indians. Though our language is Sanskrit-based, it is a distinct language. A rising nationality shows signs of life by way of extending domination over others. Alas! it is otherwise, we are incapable of self-defence today! We are not only dependent, but even a dependent neighbour is trying to swallow us, taking advantage of our helplessness. Brother Asamiya! recollect your past glory to have an understanding of the present situation" (Guha, 1980: 1703)"

The All Assam Students Union (AASU) was along with the Assam Sahitya Sabha the backbone of the agitation. It took up the cause of Assamese nationalism and represented the aspirations and vision of the young educated middle class Assamese intellectuals. The rise of the AASU could very well be ascribed to its nationalist call rather than political affiliations. Infact, after the agitation the AASU riding on popular support and success of the movement formed a political party which subsequently came to power. AASU was seen by the Assamese people as the upholder of the Assamese language and culture, it organized rallies, took out processions, and made cultural icons out of singers whose song it used to use as rallying call for the agitation. In effect, the Assam Sahitya Sabha was the ideologue and AASU became the organizational backbone for the agitation.

The phase from 1978 to 1985 was also marked by political turmoil for Assam. The Congress which had ruled Assam for major part post independence lost the elections. 'Janata Dal' formed the government in Assam in 1978 along with the Communist Part of India. This government lasted for a total of 18 months led by Golap Borbora. The Janata Dal government was initially in favour of screening of the voters and eliminating non-citizens from voting, one of the major demands of the people leading the agitation. The agitationists demanded that the electoral roll preparation be completed before the parliamentary elections of 1980. But the fall of the Janata government in 1979 complicated matters. The new caretaker coalition government with J.N. Hazarika refused to screen voters arguing that many genuine citizens who had come during partition as refugees would be left out as a result, and they too deserved to be Indian citizens.

The Congress and the Communist Party of India were against the screening process of electoral rolls. This crisis was a flash point in the agitation which ultimately led to the boycott of the 1980 parliamentary elections, in which elections to 12 out of the 14 parliamentary constituencies could not be held. One of the important events was the anti-communist stance taken by the pro-agitation groups. They argued that the left in Assam were agents of the Bengalis, and even many Assamese intellectuals were viewed with suspicion during the time. The anti-left stance also resulted in widespread violence across the state, as they were accused of harbouring the Bengali Muslim tenants, who worked on the agricultural lands of landowners. Sivaprasad Barua one of the famous tea planter of his times started in the 1935 Assam's first daily newspaper, the *Dainik Batori*, with Nilomoni Phukan as its editor. It was in course of an article published in this news-daily in 1937 that Jnananath Bora, a law teacher, held of the threat of Assam's secession from India. This idea of secession again found voice during the agitation when the *All*

Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP)[25], an active organization during the agitation, raised the demand for secession. The non-committal nature of the government to screen the electoral rolls according to their wishes led AAGSP to raise the idea of exploitation of the region of its mineral riches.

From the period of the fall of the Janata government in 1979 till the time the parliamentary elections got over in 1980 and Indira Gandhi took over there was complete lawlessness in the state. The agitation was at its peak during the period, and the press in Assam played a pivotal role during this phase. "Detect, disenfranchise and deport or disperse all 'foreigners' these are the main slogans around which the agitation was built up and is still sustained by a united front of several local organizations, with the backing of the local press media" (Dasgupta and Guha, 1985: 843).

Post fall of the Janata government, the volatile situation in Assam continued unabated. "Not just the members of organizations such as AASU and All *Assam Gana Sangram Parishad* (AAGSP) who were active during the agitation even government machinery was found to be hand in glove with them. The police, the bureaucracy, the lower echelons of the judiciary and even the Guwahati Broadcasting Station of the AIR all were found colluding to boost the agitation" (Dasgupta and Guha, 1985: 843).

It was during this period that the press took an active role in the agitation. Some of the left leaning publications also had to face the brunt of the agitators; while in general, the press supported the idea of the agitation. "From June 1979 onwards, the press directed its hatred

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[25] *All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad* was an amalgamation of several organization that were fighting for the same cause during Assam Agitation. For better leverage, the *Parishad* was formed to pressurize the central government to give in to their demands.

campaign almost exclusively against the so called 'Bangladeshis'" (Guha, 1980: 1706).

It was in July 1978 that in a working committee meeting of the Assam Sahitya Sabha, a resolution was passed expressing concern over the fresh influx of immigrants across the border. The daily *Dainik Asom* flashed the news the next day with a large space for the article. Press' response was both open and subversive. "The message of violence was carried even in the state's premier daily newspapers. On the election day of February 16, 1983 when the Brahmaputra Valley was burning, The Assam Tribune of Guwahati, for instance, carried a significant quotation under the caption 'MESSAGE FOR TODAY' on top of its editorial column. It was as follows: 'The very first essential for success is a perpetually constant and regular employment of violence-Adolf Hitler'. 'Message for Today' appeared in the same paper and in the same place, again, on the last day of the elections, i e, on February 21, in the form of yet another quotation. This time it was from Benito Mussolini: 'There is a violence that liberates, and a violence that enslaves; there is violence that is moral and a violence that is immoral" (Dasgupta and Guha, 1985: 844).

The attack on the left leaders also spilled into attacks on their institutions. *Kalakhar*, a progressive Assamese weekly came under attack. Its printing press in Guwahati was ransacked and broken up by force by a rally of protesting youths on August 17, 1980. The attacks on the left came under scrutiny "in an editorial article entitled 'Nationalism: In Whose Interest?" in its October 1978 issue, the *Sampratik Sainyikii*, a progressive Assamese monthly, viewed the rising chauvinism as an indication that the conspiracy of the national and international vested interests against the growing leftist forces had started yielding its bitter fruits. The editor deplored the complacency and lack of political will on the part of the left to close their ranks and forestall any further worsening of the situation by an alternative programme of left and democratic unity

to combat the danger and, at the same time, to voice the frustrations and injured feelings of the Assamese people (Guha, 1980:1706). The Assam Tribune, on November 8, 1979, published news with the caption: "Fear of Assamese about Outsiders Is Genuine and Real - Says Jyoti Basu."

The agitation therefore was a result of the direct control of the press by the capitalist class in Assam. And the press enabled itself to be the change that the middle class was looking for. Without the active participation of the press in Assam during the period of 1979-1985, the agitation would not have been successful, the rallying call were given by the press editors most of whom became active members of the protests. Many journalists were activist reporters who helped in opinion formation in favour of the agitation. The Assam Sahitya Sabha and organizations such as those remained only ideologues and tried to remain away from the political process. It was AASU that became politically involved, as seen later it transformed itself to a political party, in organizing the groundswell of support that the agitation needed and, which was dictated by the press instilled by its idea of cultural imperialism.

3.4 Post-Agitation Press

Overnight a young class of students, barely out of their teens, basically students had become extremely powerful in the new dispensation. Aided by a media, that was only too eager, to crown new heroes of a society that was bereft of them since the times of Lachit Barphukan[26], the Ahom general. The press during the agitation was one of the crucial factors in whipping up public sentiment for the movement. Language which was the

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[26] Lachit Barphukan was an Ahom general who had fought against the Mughal Army and defeated them a number of times.

corner stone of the whole movement became a tool in the writings of the press.

The Assam Agitation and its aftermath saw the rise of print media with a new vigour. The resurgence was particularly characterized by effusion of Assamese nationalism and the new found confidence of having formulated a treaty with the Indian state that made the pressure groups particularly the AASU, the student's group at par in negotiating terms with the Indian state. This renewed confidence in the spirit of nationalism was nothing short of historical.

After the signing of the Accord between the AASU led by Prafulla Kumar Mahanta and then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, the state assembly was dissolved to be followed by fresh elections. The Assam Accord was historic, as the central government recognized the demands of the agitationists, like updating of the electoral rolls, setting up of central university, an IIT, and various other demands which would fulfill the economic potential of the state and give the resources at the hands of the people.

The national media went gaga over the achievements of the youth brigade. In 1985 after the elections were held Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), a new regional dispensation which was led by the former leaders of the AASU won the elections and formed the new government. Prafulla Kumar Mahanta became the youngest chief minister in the history of independent India. The expectations from the new government were huge, and the people of Assam had high hopes.

The performance of the new government left many things to be desired and the press' honeymoon period with the movement leaders got over soon. The AGP came to power twice first from 1985-1990 and again

from 1996-2001 and both terms Prafulla Kumar Mahanta was the Chief Minister.

In an article in The Indian Express, Shekhar Gupta (2001) aptly summarizes the general feeling of media's disappointment with the new leaders,

> "Northeast, particularly Assam, was then a unique story, perhaps the only one in independent history when the national media's sympathy – even admiration- was with the trouble-makers. ..In conversation, they were just "boys" ...... the first time such a thing happened in our independent history. If you spoke Bengali, you were an infiltrator" and, therefore, in trouble. But what Mahanta, Phukan and others also proved subsequently was that ethnic hatred was negotiable as long as they had political power. They forgot the foreigners' issue, deported even fewer infiltrators than the Congress governments had done in the past and failed to bring in even the most basic concessions to their impoverished state from the Centre..... Mahanta has run the most ineffectual, unimaginative and worthless government in Assam in a long, long time and chances are that his own voters are now going to make him pay for it."

Other such excerpts from the press in Assam portray the sense of pessimism and disappointment that had engulfed the state. The press which had so passionately supported the movement leaders was now asking for their removal.

"The Assamese people would realize their mistakes then when not even a single AGP minister would be able to go to the legislative assembly"- Homen Borgohain, *Sutradhar*, June 1990.

"This AGP ministry is sorrow to the entire Assamese community"- Homen Borgohain, *Sutradhar*, Oct 1990.

"Bhrigu Kumar Phukan is the most corrupt minister in my ministry" was said by his own Chief Minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta and there appeared rift within the ministry which was reported widely- *Dainik Agradoot*, 3rd April, 1991.

"Mahanta's worthlessness, weakness and treacherousness created such grave law and order problems that President's rule had to be imposed" Bhrigu Kmar Phukan, another minister made a public statement against the Chief Minister after the imposition of President's rule in the state- *Natun Dainik*, 26th March 1991.

"People caste their valuable votes and brought the AGP party to power so as to implement the Assam Accord and detect and deport foreigners (illegal migrants) from Assam. But even after fighting for four years could not gather information of lakhs and lakhs of foreigners. Hence, during AGP's tenure it was proved that presence of lakhs of foreigners in Assam is not true. That means the AASU-Ganasangram Parishad's 6 years of agitation was based on false data". – Hemen Das, *Sutradhar*, May 1990.

The Press in Assam thus, played an extremely crucial role in shaping the contemporary history of Assam. Right from the beginning when *Orunodoi* was published, Press has been the cornerstone of the essence of Assamese identity. It helped formalizing the idea of a modern language system with proper grammar under the guidance of the Missionaries. The standard Assamese language had an intrinsic connection with the dialect that the *Orunodoi* made popular as Anderson (1983: 45) says "the origins of print-languages and the differentiation of status between them were largely unselfconscious processes resulting from the explosive interaction between capitalism, technology and human linguistic diversity", thus setting the idea in motion of the formation of a modern nation which the Press in Assam so diligently pursued throughout the Independence

movement, the language movement and the Assam agitation. The morphology of the modern nation has language as its central argument and Assam also faced the issue of language until its very recent history.

What started as a print revolution in Assam brought along by the Baptist missionaries in a pre-print era where national boundaries were imagined as traveled distances and national consciousness was absent to the era of print-capitalism as we see in the agitation days, with the birth of a imagined nation, Assam in the twenty first century moved towards the post-print era.

I will analyse the press in Assam in the post-print era, the advent of electronic media and the surge in satellite television in the context of Assam in the next chapter.

Chapter IV

Emergent Media: Rise of 24x7 News in Assam

4.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter gives an overview of the evolution of media in Assam in an epistemological manner, but it stops short of elaborating on the present state of affairs. The historical overview helps in understanding the trajectory of growth that media has had in Assam and the region. Various factors such as language, colonial rule, regional forces etc. have been discussed which shaped media all along. The present chapter takes forward the arguments placed in the previous chapter and attempts to analyse the contemporary state of affairs in the state media.

This chapter is based on empirical data collected through observation and interviews conducted with media professionals across the state. As has already been explained in the research design (chapter i) I conducted 15 interviews based on a semi structured guide to interview. As the interviews were long and conducted in a discussion mode there were many questions that were asked impromptu based on answers received. I tried to keep the interviews informal and conducted them not as Q and A sessions but more as discussions, which helped the interviewees to open up to me. The sample size is large enough for the objectives considered and done on a purposive basis. All the persons interviewed are senior professional who have been in the field for a number of years. Their insights were important to conduct the study and have been backed up by field observation of the state of media in Assam. I am interested in the period post- 2004 when the first electronic media channel NE Television made an entry into the market. This was for the first time that a private

satellite television channel was set up in the North East[27]. Print media which had been the sole source of information till then started facing competition. The idea of the press in Assam now included electronic media as well. It competed for space with the print media as there were no competing television channels. NE TV claimed to cater to the aspirations of the whole region and it took it upon itself to be the voice for their aspirations. The notion of catering to local aspirations has been studied by many scholars. Moy *et al.* (2004) found that readers have a level of trust in the local media and see it as playing a crucial role in democracy. They also found that those who pay attention to local newspapers are more politically involved, and perceive themselves as better informed about local affairs (pg. 541-542), providing some evidence that the local press serves a valuable function in the formation of the public sphere.

The empirical data is presented herewith

4.2 Growth of Newspapers

Assam has all along been a print society and the coming of electronic media saw new changes happening on the ground. The already established print sector saw changes in line with the new developments. As is the case with media elsewhere people predicted the doom of print media. But more than the doom what was distinct was a rise in 'news' content. Even in case of newspaper there was an increase in the number of dailies.

As Prasanta Rajguru the editor of *Aamar Asom* says "They don't read, but still papers are coming up. I don't think people read all of them. Thirty newspapers in a tiny state like Assam is no joke. It's too much."

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[27] The eight states situated in the north eastern part of India are referred to as the North East. These states are Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Tripura, Manipur, Nagaland and Sikkim.

Rajguru's own Assamese daily which is up there among the top selling newspapers in Assam faces stiff competition from the electronic media and other print adversaries. *'Amar Asom'* in the Indian Readership Survey quarter 1, 2011 retained its 6th spot with an AIR of 1.92 lakh as compared to 2.05 lakh in the previous quarter and 2.44 lakh in IRS Q1 2010. In the context of the national scenario Neyazi (2010: 910) argues, "the resurgence of Hindi newspapers has made it difficult for English-language newspapers to continue their dominance over the social, cultural and political spheres in postcolonial India. It has also resulted in widening the political and cultural space available for the hitherto marginalized groups who could not participate in 'national' public sphere because of a certain dominant mode of discourse and the hegemony of the English-speaking 'national' elite." The advent of the electronic media saw dipping sales for sure, but the number of newspapers being published grew astoundingly. So, all the talk about falling sales was actually the division of readership among a larger pool of contenders.

Assam has historically a strong presence in the regional language newspaper sector. Apart from Assamese- Bengali and Hindi newspapers are doing well. By 2013, at least thirty dailies were published from Guwahati alone out of which majority were in the regional language category. In an era where newspapers sales are fast declining Prasanta Rajguru's disillusionment with the scenario can be well understood in his words "in Assam I don't see any hopeful situation now. First of all the media houses, their business, their economy is not sustainable. Media as a trade or business is no more sustainable in the state of Assam. That apart the vernacular schools are degenerating, their numbers are coming down, and in even the remote villages you see the English medium schools. I think after 10- 20 years a family which can afford a single newspaper will not go for two newspapers-one English and one vernacular. They will go only for the English. So, the future of vernacular journalism is not at all hopeful."

Quite on the contrary the Resident Editor of The Telegraph in Guwahati, a Kolkata based publication which has its field office here seems optimistic "you can't replace newspapers. Newspaper is something you can roll up under your arm and take it to work. Cant do that with television. A newspaper will give you analysis, television cannot do that. You read a newspaper story twice television cannot do that. Television is all about visual, minus the visual there is no news. We will give you news minus the visuals. Obviously newspaper carry a lot of pictures but we don't carry ten pictures but only one that gives you the big picture and everything else that goes with it. All that television cannot do. In a court story we can give you the quote from a judge. But can you put the microphone to judge's face?" He seems optimistic not just for the English print media but for print as a whole. And his optimism stems from the historical aspect of Assam's rich tradition in print. On the ground the optimism doesn't seem unfounded, Guwahati itself boasts of over thirty daily publications most of them in Assamese and English, Bengali, Hindi and other languages as well. Print seems to be doing well at least in numbers. Jeffrey (2000) has documented the reasons for the growth of Indian-language newspapers, which he attributes to five factors: (a) the rise of capitalism; (b) the communications revolution; (c) the growth of advertising industry; (d) the rise in literacy levels; (e) interest in the political news.

Samudra Gupta Kashyap tends to differ and gives a different perspective to this story of growth "actually there are too many papers for a small state like Assam. Apart from one or two none of them are selling. There is something fishy about it. There are a lot of doubts about these issues, why I think is that one: content is total rubbish except for one or two newspapers. Two: they do not generate content. They mostly depend on what comes by post. People write articles and they don't have to pay for it, instead I have a doubt that some people are paying to get their article published. So much so that they cannot fill up space, they are using

jokes; they are putting poetry and many other things, even lessons from the class nine or class ten courses to fill up their pages." Whatever might be his view the matter of the fact is these newspapers are being sold and the Indian Readership Survey (IRS) prove the point year after year. The NRS 2006 reported that in India vernacular dailies have grown from 191 million readers to 203.6 million, while English-language dailies have stagnated at around 21 million. This, is a point in case of where the growth in the print sector is coming from and same is the case with Assam. The growth of the print in Assam coincided with the early days of the electronic media. The imminent threat that loomed large on the print sector made the print industry to pull up its socks and think of ingenious ways to keep hold of its readers.

Formerly editor of Prime News, Manjit Mahanta makes the point "even in newspapers we have seen there is more colour, headlines have become more shorter and catchier, more pictures in each edition, Bollywood[28] photos are more, more lifestyle articles etc." The local press in Assam underwent a drastic facelift in its printing, design and content too. Colour pages were introduced initially in one or two pages which in case of some newspapers gradually covered all the pages. 'The Sentinel' was the first newspaper to introduce the offset press photo typeset, and later others followed. While mentioning the rise of Hindi dailies in the national context Neyazi says "the vernacular modernity produced as a result of rise of the Hindi media is a hybrid form of global and local, foreign and indigenous, elite and vernacular. Such hybridization strategies have enabled the producers of Hindi news media to fight against the dominance of English-language news media by creating a vernacular modernity" (2010: 912). In the case of Assam it was a little different; the competition was not from the English print media but against electronic media post-2004. There was a fight for the local media space which was hitherto the domain of the print industry

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[28] The Hindi Film industry that is based in Mumbai is popularly termed as Bolywood.

Assam has transportation bottlenecks as one of the main reasons for the media not flourishing in the interior areas. Most of the newspapers are based in Guwahati; the printing, designing is done here and sent to the interiors by road. Even if some of the newspapers were based outside Guwahati like *Dainik Janmabhumi*[29], they have set up office here to beat the bottlenecks. Pranab Bora opines "Logistics is a huge thing. We print here. Connections here are better. Airport works better. Railways setup is better. A lot of NE students come and study here, a talent pool. Quite a lot of journalism schools are based here... its easier to meet North East CM's in Delhi than in Guwahati same way it's easier to get them here than travel to each states. There is Mizoram house, Nagaland house. It is easier to catch them here. But at the end of the day it is the commercial hub of NE. You can start in Silchar[30] like they have started *Jugasankha*[31], but they have finally come to Guwahati." For a long time newspapers would reach late to the towns and villages. The farther they were away from Guwahati the late they got their news. "There are many places within Assam who don't get their newspapers along with their morning cup of tea. The newspapers are transported by road covering a long distance up to 12 to 18 hours before it reaches its destinations, for instance, Silchar one of the major towns of south Assam is about 400 KMs from Guwahati and the road travels through the hills of Meghalaya it takes 12 hours to reach." (Anbarasan, 2013: 10). That explains the need to open up more offices and localize the production process across the state only to beat the time lack. Most established newspapers today have their printing press in Jorhat or Dibrugarh apart from Guwahati.

These local dynamics which are peculiar to Assam also impacted how the national newspaper came and explored the market, some succeeded and some failed miserably. "When Telegraph came in local

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[29] *Dainik Janmabhumi*, an Assamese daily was started in Jorhat, and later established its Guwahati edition.

[30] District headquarters of Cachar.

[31] Bengali news daily published from Silchar, which later opened editions in Guwahati and Dibrugarh.

media made room for Telegraph and now it is doing well. Assam tribune is there. English media today I think is looking at from this perspective Telegraph is publishing from Guwahati and Jorhat, Times of India from Guwahati, Hindustan Times came and went back. Asian Age came but did not work out." (Pranab Bora)

Newspapers in Assam have thus remained in the reckoning due to the unexplored local space. Localization in the real sense is only happening now with many of the established names going rural with their reporting and trying to explore the unexplored. Their reach in the interiors give them an upper hand to take on the onslaught of electronic news media. "As the outlook of television is largely national, regional and local spaces have mostly remained unoccupied and are now being appropriated by Indian-language newspapers. However, the fight for regional markets has already begun with the coming of regional satellite channels such as Sahara TV and ETV" (Neyazi, 2010: 918).

4.3 Electronic Media in Assam

Satellite television channels made an entry into Assam with NE TV in 2004. A constituent of Positiv Television Private Limited based in Guwahati, it started its operations as a channel for North East India. Taking advantage of being an early starter it catered to different language groups. On a single platform it telecasted news in more than 15 regional languages. Its punch line enumerated its advantage in the market 'follow the leader'. The initial success of North East Television led to new channels entering the television space of Assam. 'News Live' and 'DY365' followed in 2008. Paragmoni Aditya, the Political Editor of News Live says "We had earlier Prag channel, local cable television in Guwahati and North East TV. The problem is that we have hundreds of

dialects in NE, some are major languages some are minor dialects. When NE TV started they were focusing on different area specific programmes across NE. So they failed to highlight serious issues as airtime was short for all. Then we (News Live) began in January, 2008 and then onwards, our focus was that our own glory, we have something great here in Assam, great people, great things and then there are bad things like floods. So now for the last 72 hours for e.g. we are running continuous coverage on floods, 40-60 people are continuously working in the remotest parts of Assam."

What Paragmoni specifically points out is the concentration of later channels on Assam itself. While NE TV tried to do too much in a single channel the later media channels had the advantage of knowing the still unexplored market better. The regional focus shifted to local issues and Assam became the main source of news for the channels. 'News Live' started operations in January, 2008 while 'DY365' started in October, 2008 two major players in the satellite television space of Assam. They redefined the television market and opened up new avenues of media growth in the region.

Pranjal Phukan, a senior journalist is excited by the changing scene: "The future of electronic media in Assam is very bright. But one thing, there might be more channels, may be frequently they will keep coming, and as we have seen in the national scene if the channels cannot live upto the competition they cannot survive and will finally wind up. Channels which will dedicatedly go about their work will only survive." He is harping on the core journalistic principles for the success of television channels. Television is often accused of diluting the content for the market. Samudra Gupta Kashyap of the Indian Express highlights this, "they are not trained and not innovative; do not have any research back up. They don't know what content analysis means and do not have expertise. When they see that these people are talking about a scandal

they search for another scandal. If one (channel) has started an evening song programme the other also starts". Criticism has been forthcoming from all sections of the journalist community against the television channels. But most of the journalists who make up the staff of these new channels are invariably from the print media. Parag Moni Aditya explains "all the people working in other channels are very good journalists, they have a long career and they have achieved something and they have put their career in line (by joining television). They are full of dedication and they are covering every nook and corner of Assam."

In its punch line DY365 says *Nirbhik Nirapekhyao aru Bisvasta* (Fearless, Unbiased, and Trustworthy) three major characteristics of true journalism. It also writes in its homepage "DY 365 wants to be the harbinger of serious entity, wherein the masses and their views are involved, setting a stage for peoples' forum wherein the news involves the masses and not only the corridors of power." It distances itself from the corridors of power and promises to be the voice of the people, answering some of the accusations that are leveled against them.

Manjit Mahanta says the influx of television news media will "affect the newspapers. People have taken to watching television in a big way. As an entertaining medium, channels have an advantage. Newspapers play a key role in society but if they too become entertainers they cannot compete." Its no surprise therefore that most of the criticism that the television media faces comes from the print. The Indian Readership Survey second quarter 2011 survey shows that *Asomiya Pratidin*, which is the highest-circulated (150000 copies) daily in the entire North East, has lost 2.2 per cent readership.

The second in terms of circulation as well as readership, *Asomiya Khabar*, too, has lost readership. The other popular language dailies *Dainik Janmabhumi, Dainik Agradoot, Amar Asom, Dainik Asom, and*

Dainik Janasadharan also recorded loss of a huge number of readerships. The only exception is The Assam Tribune (with nearly 75,000 print-orders every day), which recorded a marginal increase in the number of readers. The Telegraph and The Times of India, too, have lost readership since the early months of 2011. Naturally, people who are not happy with the 24x7 news channels are people from the print media who feel threatened. "The news channels in regional languages may have influenced circulation figure and the readership index of local newspapers in Assam, as everyone prefers channels for prompt and brief news," said Rupam Barua, a senior journalist and media observer (cited in Thakuria, 2011).

Editors of newspapers don't seem to agree with this proposition. Dinkar Kumar of Sentinel Hindi opines "it has not made much of a difference to newspapers; if, television channels don't have quality it does not make much of a difference. What we have seen is that people are not happy or influenced by the few channels which have come up. Television is never clear with stories. If you have to go in detail of any story visual is important but now at the moment television channels are not able to deliver...there has not been much of an influence. There is only one thing. Each one is copying the other. If one starts a music programme in the evening the other also starts, if one comes up with a competition the other starts too, if one shows breaking news the other follows. The viewer is also intelligent they understand copycats, if they don't like immediately they have the option of changing the channel. In India the time hasn't come that TV will upstage newspapers."

But reality is that more television channels are entering the space. In 2010, 'News Time Assam' also launched its services as a satellite television channel. It was followed by another 24x7 channel 'Frontier Television'. Both these channels needed manpower for their operations, and the human resource pool is limited in a state like Assam. Frontier

Television's website says "Some of the best known career journalists drawn from print and TV set-ups have joined us to ensure that we have the best and most credible team of news-gathering." It boasts of professionals from the print industry, people with journalistic experience who lend legitimacy to the claim of such channels that they produce content which live up to journalistic ideals. Samudra Gupta Kashyap says "New channels will keep coming up. They will continue to burst on the seam and you will find lot of people disappearing from the scene. And this is because they do not know what they are trying to do. NE TV is shutting down and a new one is coming up, two dailies are also supposed to come up. And there is change of ownership, a television channel has been bought up by the largest circulated daily." It is no surprise then that print media journalists have been avid watcher of the unfolding electronic media scenario in the state.

The emergence of the satellite television in the state has meant that both the print and television have to rely on the same market pie, advertisement revenue comes from Guwahati and both print and television are situated here. The competition is fierce and palpable. Bashistha Pandey opines "Print media has got its own importance. In electronic media news come with visuals so people are naturally attracted. But the demand of print media is the same as it was before. Print media works as a tangible document. What gets printed is there, you read it today or ten days later, in television you watched it or not, once it is broadcasted it's gone. Both have different characteristics, the tastes of people are also different. So both the mediums are important in their own right. So, I don't think that electronic media has posed serious challenges to print. The challenge is that print should publish good news and to give the readers what they want."

On the other hand Prasanta Rajguru offers a contrary argument "as far as the goals of the newspapers are concerned it has been affected. For

e.g. we are doing stories on river dams, at least 3-4 vernacular dailies in Assam are opposing river dams and the people who are concerned about river dams are living in Lakhimpur, Dhemaji districts. So naturally our expectations are that our growth will be high in those areas. But it is not so, it is because of television. Circulations are not coming down but growth is not as expected." He almost suggests the adverse effect that electronic media has had on print.

Although newspapers have taken to new style sheet and increasing the quotient of entertainment in their newspapers, it cannot compete with the programming style of television. Argues Pranjal Phukan "in some cases we see glamour quotient is higher in electronic medium than print. Many people want to come on screen for the glamour element. Secondly, in today's date the popularity of the electronic media has gone up manifolds. Not just popularity but also its influence has increased, the impact that electronic media has with breaking news, in case of print which comes out the next day, the impact even if by little is still less than electronic media." This dependence on glamour has brought a new genre of journalism in Assam. Some are amused but many senior professionals are not. Manjit Mahanta again says "news media specifically electronic media is largely motivated, biased, mostly out of focus. Newspaper too gives such news and they have limitations, but channels have more limitations. They have to compromise more, their business is larger, lot of money is involved and so called Television Rating Point (TRP) game makes them to show many non-news as news, and real news they ignore. But yes there is space for more people."

Space for more people is obviously there and more television channels are in the pipeline. Creating new programmes become a challenging task; Samudra Gupta Kashyap asserts the point "what happens for a newspaper is that they have to fill up 12 pages of which they have advertisements, editorials, magazine section, city, region page

etc. They have a system, they have limited space. For television they have to be 24x7, round the clock. Where would they generate the content, how would they generate the content. For one they have never done a market survey before they launched a channel." A close observation of the two leading electronic media channels shows that most of the content generated is a copycat of the other. And most of the time these programmes are slotted at the same hour. So, if one has a talk show called *'Mat-Bhinnamat'* the other comes up with *'Prekhyapot'*, Talk Time is met with *'Prasongokrome'*, Reality show *'Bihu Rani'* has 'Bihu Kunwari' to contend with, 'DY Medley' has a counterpart in *'Jhankar'*, *'Raijor Kathgora'* is met with *'Ji Kom Socha Kom'*. The schedule of programming hints that in a bid to outdo each other they end up being imitators of others. Original programming is at a premium.

Pratap Bordoloi himself the editor of News Time Assam and a senior journalist with over three decades of experience says "If we think of a healthy society electronic media hasn't been able to contribute. If today you ask the young generation they will say we find more information on the Internet. This generation likes to do further analysis and research on issues. Even the media today collects little local information but all other information is collected from the Internet." He is critical of the superficiality of the medium that is television.

This makes it easier to criticize the electronic media as Dinkar Kumar points "they (electronic media) are not only immature but also don't understand what to show and what not to. They think there is a lot of money and lot of influence can be earned by opening television channels. But they have not been able to achieve what they wanted. If you have a powerful tool and you don't know how to use it then you are bound to misuse it." He is severe on the lack of research and objectivity that these new channels display. But inspite of all such criticism Manjit Mahanta says "it (satellite channels) will affect the newspapers. People have taken

to watching television in a big way. As an entertaining medium channels have an advantage. Newspapers play a key role in society but if they become entertainers they can't compete. If 'The Assam Tribune' today opens a channel they cannot give entertainment, but that is the quality or characteristics of channels. India Today is a serious magazine but *Aaj Tak*, the channel of the same group is an entertaining channel."

There is a lack of focus among the channels about their target group. DY365 in its manifesto says "NORTH EAST, an integral part of India, with its charm and diversity, is a heaven in terms of its culture, natural beauty, resources and its unique individuality. Guwahati, the gateway to Seven Sisters, acts as the threshold to North East... The vision is to show the world the real picture of the region." And so it started in 2008 with transmission in Assamese, Bengali, Hindi and English in consonance with its said mission. But in 2013 it abruptly stopped transmission in English, Hindi and Bengali and only stuck to Assamese. The model served up by NE TV of catering to the whole region was not working for other channels. Too many languages and too many focuses were diluting the content. News Time Assam which came only in 2010 had the advantage of being a late entrant; from the beginning it has been making its programmes only in Assamese, a sign of the change in focus. News Live had other ideas and it started two more channels which catered only entertainment fare in Assamese. They understood the market better than the other players. Paragmoni Aditya says "we (News Live) have come in and established the market. We have 3 channels *Rang*, *Ramdhenu* and Newslive and if you see the viewership we cover 70% of the viewers, which means we get 70% of revenue, so, the others divide the rest 30% in such a scenario it is difficult to survive.

It is clear that although the first satellite television channel came in 2004, it is only in the last couple of years that the market is taking shape. New players have started to consolidate and now know better what the

people want. The print sector is also getting used to the new order, facing challenges not only in news content and sales but also attrition of senior employees to the electronic media.

4.4 Press and Dirty Money

The capital required to run a media organization is huge, and profits even harder to come by. It takes years of operation to break even and earn profits. Then what explains the boom seen in the recent years in the media sector. Where does this capital come from? And are there such profits that it can have space for more players in the market. Writing in 'The Hindu', Sevanti Ninan opines "Regional media is increasingly a colourful mosaic in terms of who owns it or runs it, be it TV or newspapers, or periodicals. And a State which runs the gamut of possibilities is Assam. Congressmen, ULFA (United Liberation Front of Asom) sympathisers, former militants, former bureaucrats and police officers, litterateurs and novelists: the State's proprietors and editors are drawn from all these categories" (2009). She echoes the ownership pattern of the state media aptly. It is only two publication houses Assam Tribune group and *Dainik Janmabhumi* that are involved only in the media sector. Assam Tribune has completed 75 years of its existence and is still going strong. Paragmoni Aditya says "it (newspapers) was started as a mission by groups such as *Dainik Janmabhumi* and Assam Tribune, it started as a mission but activism is still there, and I believe are well qualified and fit for other jobs as well. But yes sometimes some people have some intentions; the people who have the cash pool may have (questionable) intentions." But media in Assam today is no longer a mission, only a business opportunity.

Samudra Gupta Kashyap says as a point in fact "It is all dirty money in circulation. It is also influencing the content that's what I believe. Otherwise why would a channel, a particular channel they have a weekly one hour personality based interview programme one to one. On a channel I found one whole hour repeated twice in the next seven days till the next episode comes, was the interview of a former MLA of a constituency. He was not an important political leader, an independent MLA elected for two terms, a former half educated former ULFA cadre. So this man also appears for one full hour and the anchor asks him all kinds of question under the sun, and this man also tries to answer, and it is glorification of this man. What other interest would it serve apart from personal gain to interview such a person for a show? There must be some exchange of money. People are not waiting to listen to that man's one hour interview."

When the regional media space in India suddenly witnessed a dramatic boom, it was the Telegu news channels which led the way, by investing heavily in media organizations, technology and manpower. "The dramatic expansion of Telegu news media channels over the past ten years is fuelled in large part by the availability of large amounts of 'speculative capital' within underground, 'grey' or otherwise illicit economies, coupled with the growing numbers of a 'lumpen political class' that sees in the establishment of a news channel a pathway to social and political legitimization and influence (Shaw, 2009). NE TV which started its transmission on March 16, 2004, was thought of as a game changer. But by 2008 things started to sour between the two co-owners, and allegations started to be heard about financial irregularities. The channel had to finally close down for a year before it could start production again in a new avatar with six channels viz. Focus News, Focus Haryana, Focus Bangla, Focus Odisha, Focus NE, and Focus Hi Fi. It rebranded itself and opened channels in Odisha and Haryana. The company is now under the scanner of Company Law Board for taking

loans from the scam tainted Saradha Group and also an alleged firm involved in the coal scam of the country called Jindal Realties owned by former Congress parliamentarian Naveen Jindal.

Dinkar Kumar "As you see market can only grow. Newspaper is like market today, it's no longer a mission; almost like the opening of shopping malls. Now people have money and even politicians are investing. Earlier it was not so, it is happening elsewhere and here too. Everybody has a newspaper and thinks that it will come to serve different purposes. The main factor of opening newspapers is the influence. How much of help it comes to is a different issue. But some surely open for influence, and some use it as a mask for different business interest. If you look closely there are a handful of groups that only have interest in the media sector like Assam Tribune group, Sentinel group, these are real newspapers as they don't have other interests. Others have different business interests and the newspaper acts as a mouthpiece or a mask."

In 2011, Seven Sisters Post, a new daily was launched from Guwahati with much fanfare. It claimed to be the only regional newspaper catering to the aspirations of the people of the North east. What was a promising start soon ended in catastrophe for the employees. The daily was owned by the Saradha Group of West Bengal, which invested a lot of money into the North East. Salaries, for a change was good for journalists, many journalists from the region who were working in the national scene returned back. Subir Bhowmik, eminent journalist and formerly of the BBC, joined it as the editor. But catastrophe struck soon, after few months news started coming about the financial irregularities of the group and started to show on the functioning of the newspaper. Ultimately, the newspaper was shut down leaving scores of journalist's jobless overnight. What was worse was that they were not paid salary for the past few months. '*Sakalbela*' a sister publication of Seven Sisters Post which had its head office in Kolkata also shut their shop as a result. The Saradha

group was involved in one of the largest financial chit fund scam to hit the eastern region of the country. 'Prime News' another satellite television channel was launched by a chit fund group '*Jeevan Surakhya*'. After it got engulfed in financial problems, the group sold the channel to a real estate company Brahmaputra Infrastructure private limited owned by Suresh Prithani in 2012. And after a few months of functioning it stopped broadcasting from October 1, 2013, leaving around 170 employees, journalists and technicians jobless overnight.

Dinkar Kumar says "it is disappointing. The real problems of the people are not discussed. All unnecessary things are discussed more. Because, all people with money have opened channels and newspaper and they only think about their own interests." Most proprietors in Assam are people who have not come to the media sector for the sake of journalism. Its businessman and contractors who invested heavily in a sector that was unexplored. The *Pratidin* Group which runs the highest selling Assamese daily '*Asomiya Pratidin*', the weekly *Sadin* and the women's magazine *Nandini* and also recently took over News Time Assam another satellite news channel beaming from Assam is one such example owned by the contractor Jayanta Baruah. Partha Pratim Baruah writes in The Times of Assam web portal "the current scenario being exhibited in Assamese newspapers is just an example of how treacherous and characterless our state of the media is."

News Time Assam which was started in 2010 also faced a precarious situation financially. Started by the Rose Valley group of Kolkata under the company Brand Value Communication, News Time Assam was unable to garner profits. The company's financials were precarious and was on the verge of closing down when the *Pratidin* Group bought it for an undisclosed sum and started operating it from March 1, 2013. Incidentally Rose Valley group was also a chit fund company dabbling in the real estate sector all over the Northeast. Manjit Mahanta puts the point

across when he says "in the electronic media, I have a doubt whether there is a owner who loves basic journalism, but these are the kind of owners who are the majority in electronic media."

4.5 Influence of Politicians

Politicians find media organizations as a means for furthering their political ambition. This is a trend not only peculiar to Assam but also other major states of the country. "For instance, political parties own the majority of news channels broadcasting in the four primary southern Indian languages of Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada, which constitute over a third (approximately 36 percent) of the total number of television channels that have been officially registered in the country between 2000 and June 2010 (Government of India, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 2010). Politicians have indeed invested money in the media sector in Assam. It is a State with a lot of political activity and a fair amount of commercial media, despite a low level of business activity (Ninan, 2009).

Himanta Biswa Sarma, presently a minister in the state government has stake in Pride East Entertainment Private Limited which owns News Live, *Rang* and *Ramdhenu*, three prominent satellite channels. Matang Singh, a former Congress parliamentarian owns Positiv Television Private Limited, which has six channels Focus News, Focus Haryana, Focus Bangla, Focus Odisha, Focus NE, and Focus Hi Fi. Anjan Dutta, a former minister of the Congress runs *Ajir Dainik Batori*, and Bijoy Krishna Nath, a former member of *Asom Gana Parishad* (AGP) owns the largest circulated Bengali daily *Dainik Jugasankha* and the English daily Eastern Chronicle. Prasanta Rajguru puts this trend into perspective "post 2000 scenario media had a mushroom growth in Assam. One after another

television channels were coming up, even newspapers. So, now the politicians don't bother what newspaper write because they themselves are media managers. Newslive, *Dainik Janasadharan, Dainik Batori* are owned by politicians. They hardly bother. They have got the pulse of the media because in the WTO regime they have seen that media governance is done by corporate. So, real governance is done by corporates. So the politicians, who became instrumental to the corporates, form a party."

Pranjal Phukan says "it is an unholy tradition. Whenever a politician opens a channel or a newspaper he or she will give politics the prime importance, if they don't give its good, but at some point or the other this influence will come. For the media this is really an extremely sad situation." The link between politicians and corporate world has always been strong. One cannot survive without the blessing of the other and is intrinsic to the understanding of media today. The particular patchwork trajectory of Indian media reform has yielded a minimally regulated investment terrain with spaces and opportunities for differently located social subjects to realize a variety of aspirations, ranging from profit-seeking on the part of established capitalist enterprises to 'power-seeking' or attempts by various actors to garner and consolidate political, social-cultural and economic influence (Roy, 2011: 766).

"They have every say, all the say is from the proprietor only. In Assam the role of the editor is diminishing day by day and the show is run by the proprietor. And this trend is seen in international as well in national media." This statement from Manjit Mahanta clarifies who really runs the show. Journalists are becoming tools in the hands of their proprietors. Prasanta Rajguru says "first of all maybe it is sustainable for time being. But if it is related to the person's political career, its growth is related. Once the political career comes down automatically the channel comes down." He further adds "during Assam agitation particularly media had played a big role. It was practically a media managed agitation. It was

made by media, aided by media, handled by media everything was done by media. So people who had money thought it is the only way to get extra constitutional power in order to command the conscience of the agitated people in the morning. This is the only way. And some of them were very successful." He offers a historic argument to the rise of political class proprietors in Assamese media. The Assam agitation indeed was the biggest political activism that the print media in Assam performed. Approaching the relationship between media and democracy from the perspective of substantive democracy, whereby the democratic political project of democracy is about enabling common or popular access to power – what the political theorist Sheldon Wolin calls maximizing common 'experience with' power (1989: 153) – the overall aim is to investigate how the growth of television news media has affected the distribution of social, economic, and political power, and the possibility of its redistribution, in India.

Many scholars view the rise of Hindi newspapers as part of the rise of communal and identity politics in India and hence doubt its role as a vehicle of democratization (Hasan, 1998; Rajagopal, 2001). In 1980's Assam had a strong press and editors were supposed to be the torch bearers of change. Radhika Mohan Bhagwati the editor of *Dainik Asom* says "we are the gatekeepers. I know my duties. But if today Assamese press would have played a proper role, Assam's foreigner movement would not have been derailed. I was also part of that group of editors. I lost my conscience and became a part of the agitation, part of the movement. I became biased. Again I feel if Assamese journalism would have played a proper role ethnic divisions could have been avoided. Our hatred and our superiority complex came in our thoughts."

4.6 Some Issues in Ethics

Ethics is one issue which is always shoved under the carpet. Media has always faced flak for not adhering to ethical journalistic norms when it comes to reporting. The issue of ethics cannot be seen in isolation, the previous two points of political influence and role of money are intertwined with it. With a deluge of newspapers and electronic media, Assam suddenly needed a huge number of journalists and professionals. Most of the journalists who joined were not trained people. Pay was less, and except the Assam Tribune group none other implemented the wage board salaries. So, for young journalists who joined, the job was a way to get a secure job. Journalism in itself was not the end; there was hardly any security in the job. Arijit Aditya notes "there are a lot of accusations on ' the ground. Some reporters enter as *Jugasankha* reporters after some days you see them getting government jobs. For e.g. in Hailakandi district what I have seen is that most of the newspaper reporters are government servants." As a matter of fact the stringers who report from the interiors and small town are more often than not school teachers, for whom reporting is just and added incentive to get closer to the administration and the local politicians.

In fact many politicians are known to patronize local stringers and reporters for their political gain. Samudra Gupta Kashyap narrates an experience "and local politicians are known to do two things buy them on an installment basis that's what I found. Some give the local reporters 500 rupees a month, not all newspapers but some newspapers. One MLA told me I give them 500 rupees a month. Two fellows I give 500 rupees a week, this was in Nagaon district. They write good things about me and they do not write bad things. So that is the situation here. And I know of a

local reporter who was posted in Haflong[32] he was with a print media and a new television channel requested him to do their coverage also, so he became both their reporters. So he got a small handy camera and sent his news initially by courier and subsequently by internet. After 4 or 6 months of sending news no salary was coming so he called up the editor to ask for the salary, the editor told him you are in a place like Haflong, floating in money, rather you should be giving us the money." The further you go from Guwahati the murkier the nexus gets. Examples such as these might not be the norm but they are obvious hints to the underbelly of journalistic practices in the interiors. Most often these reporters who are not on the payroll of the media organizations but are paid per article basis, double up as reporters for more than one organization, and even print and the electronic media simultaneously.

In the national scene 'scholars expressed concern over the rise of Hindi newspapers, which became synonymous with 'Hindu' newspapers, indicating the orientation of Hindi newspapers in support of the cause of Hindu chauvinist forces (Neyazi, 2010: 914). In case of Assam, Ajit Bhuyan, the editor of a daily was jailed under the National Security Act, and has been charged with burning the national flag. He and the paper's chief editor, Haider Hussain, have in the past been nominated by United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) to a roundtable to negotiate with the Government of India. Infact, there are a lot of editors and journalists who still sympathize with the banned outfit and pick up cudgels on its behalf.

"Localization has also resulted in a trivialization of news that emerged with a simultaneous empowerment of local citizens who cannot be reached by English-language newspapers" (Neyazi, 2010: 921). One of the biggest casualties in the television media is sensationalism of news. Media editors have played the role of moral police more often than not.

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[32] Haflong is the district headquarters of Dima Hasao, an autonomous region for the tribals, with its own elected council which has powers to frame rule for its people. There are nine such scheduled autonomous councils in Assam.

This was highlighted by what is now called as G.S. road[33] incident. A young girl on the night of July 9, 2012 was thrashed by a mob because she was out drinking in a pub. The girl was dragged by the mob onto the street and thrashed and sexually assaulted. All this while television crew from News Live which had arrived on the scene rolled camera and telecasted the whole incident without ever trying to intervene or help the girl. The telecast of the visuals caused huge uproar in the state, Atanu Bhuyan, the editor had to resign taking moral responsibility. But moral policing has not stopped and is a favourite past time of the electronic media here. Paragmoni Aditya of News Live tries to justify the moral policing "sometimes we have shown young girls in illicit relationship or sexual relationship where people have caught them red handed. Sometimes we show visuals of such cases, some people say this is entertaining or cheap thing. But yes, if today a girl enters somewhere with her boyfriend and does something wrong, next day some other girl after watching my bulletin will think ten times. Yes it looks bad but there are some good implications."

As Elmer Davis (1954) pointed out "the good newspaper, the good news broadcaster must walk a tightrope between two great gulfs- on one side the false objectivity that takes everything at face value and lets the public be imposed on by the charlatan with the most brazen front; on the other, the 'interpretive' reporting which fails to draw the line between objective and subjective, between a reasonably well-established fact and what the reporter or editor wishes were the fact. To say that is easy; to do it is hard." The perils of the onslaught of media are sensed in Radhika Mohan Bhagwati's words "there is ill competition between the electronic and print media. One is making news the other is breaking news. By breaking news they are changing the total condition of the media. Wherever the camera goes it becomes news. It encroaches upon people's

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[33] A popular street in Guwahati known for its malls and pubs, frequented by tourists and locals alike.

privacy and their rights also. The electronic media has a larger space as wherever it goes it becomes news. Print has to compete with this space. So many electronic channels have come what change has it brought. The competition among them is not healthy. There should actually be competition on the quality of the media but this is unholy competition. The competition is to get the market share. This market oriented stance has spoilt the tradition of media in Assam." This poses a serious question about the media and journalism ethics, and the issue of globalizing consumerism, as the drive for aggressive expansion is essentially driven by the fact that newspapers have to create audiences whom they can sell to advertisers at a time when television is rapidly taking advertising revenue away from the newspapers. (Neyazi, 2010: 916)

Radhika Mohan Bhagwati offers a way out and suggests measures for the media to adhere "there should be some self regulation. Self regulation doesn't mean that somebody will impose a code of conduct. That code of conduct should come up from us. If we do not ourselves discover a code of conduct then somebody must step in and impose on us."

4.7 Localization of Content

Localization of the press has gone hand in hand with the notion of giving power to the people. Emancipation of the masses was seen as an idealistic goal of local media. Democracy has taken the help of media to make its presence felt. Assam is one of the most underdeveloped regions in a developing nation like India. The boom in the media sector naturally heightened people's expectation from it. As with the case of the national media the process of localization started by Hindi newspapers involved decentralizing production, distribution and consumption. It was made possible because of the arrival of the new technology and the information

and communication revolution in the mid-1980s (Neyazi, 2010: 917). So much so that the localization of the press was said to be responsible for the popularity of Hindi newspapers. Ninan (2007) highlights the rise of Hindi newspapers through the process of localization.

Stuck with Guwahati for a long time, the Assamese dailies failed to find audience in the remote parts of the state what Anbarasan (2013) terms as the 'delayed news syndrome.' Newspapers would reach some parts only in the evening and by then the news would be stale. For e.g. a newspaper to reach Lakhimpur[34] or Silchar in Barak Valley it had to cover a distance of 400 kilometres by road before it could reach the readers. In 1997 the daily *Aamar Asom* published from Guwahati by G.L. Publication realizing this communication gap set up their first office outside Guwahati in Jorhat. It could easily cater well to the whole of upper Assam in the morning itself. *Asomiya Pratidin* the largest circulated daily soon followed and opened its offices in Dibrugarh and Lakhimpur, and later at Bongaigaon. Other dailies realizing the time advantage soon started following suit and imitated the localization policy adopted by the *Aamar Asom* and *Asomiya Pratidin. Jugasankha*, the premiere Bengali daily also opened a Guwahati office to tap the Brahmaputra valley market.

Pranab Bora shares the optimism "I would like to see telegraph having more editions. Sentinel has a Jorhat and Dibrugarh edition. Eastern chronicle now has valley edition. The rate of literacy in this region is very high. Given that scenario more the merrier...I think it's a good thing if you have more newspapers you have more opinion. And it is better to make opinion known on a newspaper than to pick up a gun...if you have a Golaghat newspaper they will cover Golaghat like nobody's business in every way possible." The optimism was largely attributed to the consolidation of the print dailies in early part of the decade of 2000's. It

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[34] A district on the north bank of the river Brahmaputra bordering Arunachal Pradesh.

was a boom time for the newspapers, they were doing well and most of them could afford to open new editions. It was a consolidation phase before the coming of the electronic media. The hope for localization of content grew. With new editions the dailies looked for new stories and separate pages for each edition. Jeffrey (2000: 51–74) has illustrated Eenadu's contribution in localizing the newspaper, and creating a new base for local advertising from retailers, small business and sometimes from unexpected sources, such as mourning the death of prized pets and working farm animals.

"By encroaching upon the domain of English-language newspapers as the exclusive conduit of modernity, the Hindi newspaper created a vernacular modernity which contributed to initiating a paradigmatic change that also opened up the space for the marginalized classes to participate in the global circulation of modernity" (Neyazi, 2010: 915). The local dailies in Assam also became a conduit for this form of modernity, by constantly trying to penetrate the local space, reach the interior villages and do the communication job. Prasanta Rajguru justifies "but in vernacular dailies one thing what we are doing is that we are focusing on rural developmental activities, whatever developmental activities are there in the block level or grassroot level. We cannot afford any big thinking."

Dinkar Kumar elaborates on The Sentinel's edition "we have only two editions, Guwahati and Dibrugarh. The only difference in the two editions is that Dibrugarh gets the newspaper early morning. All the pages are done here and sent, and the printing is done there. Earlier we had to transport which took time. Also Dibrugarh news is added but basically there is not much difference between the two editions. Getting the newspaper early morning is a big achievement. Earlier it would be only in the afternoons that it would reach." He specifically discounts the theory of

having local content. For them it's only a concept of making the newspaper available early in the morning.

Bashishtha Pandey says about *Purvanchal Prahari*, "there are four editions published today they are Guwahati, Jorhat, Tinsukia and Lakhimpur. Each of these editions has two separate pages on the specific area. All the pages are made here and decisions taken at Guwahati. And they are only printed at those places." So, decisions are centralized, it's only the mechanical processes that have in reality been placed at different locations. The concept of local editions in the case of Assam is a mechanical one and there was no interest in exploring the news of these areas. Arijit Aditya of *Dainik Jugasankha* explains "earlier when we had 12 page publications, we dedicated two pages for local news. One page was for Cachar and Dima Hasao districts and another for Karimganj and Hailakandi. But what happened was there was not enough news being generated to fill the two pages. Sometimes news which was not worthy to be published had to be done. Finally we mixed both the pages. We broke the titles of the page to only Barak Valley news, no longer separate district pages." There were such experiments to include supplementary pages for local news for separate editions, but most of them have been a failure. These efforts more often than not have limited themselves to a single page supplement. Where all editorial decisions are taken at a single location the importance of local news gets diluted.

The arrival of the satellite channels has opened up the local space in an unprecedented manner. Santanu Bhuyan says "What happens is that most of the stringers are teachers who report apart from their school duties. Now there are dedicated reporters in every village or every 10 kms." The pressure to generate content has seen news media going to every nook and corner of the state. But there is also criticism of the electronic media as having a deliberate Guwahati bias in its reporting. Guwahati being the commercial hub of the region sees a lot of activity

political as well as economic. It is convenient for these channels to concentrate their resources on Guwahati only. When fledgling channels such as Prime News and News Time started operations, due to their limited resources focused only on Guwahati.

Manjit Mahanta furthers the criticism "in television there is not much of local content. They package every news from international to national to local in a single news bulletin. Newspapers that way carry local news more. Local news that way in channels is ignored. For e.g. agriculture is important for a state like Assam. But we know what the minister says or any organization if they have a protest rally is news but grass root agriculture news is not done, same with other such community based reporting at the local level. We are incident based, press release based or any function related reporting. An editor sitting in Guwahati many of them won't even know where is Mancachar, or where is Namphake or a town near Hailakndi[35]. Some of them don't think Barak valley to be part of Assam, so there are limitations to their understanding which are reflected in their news selection."

"Localization has definitely helped hitherto marginalized groups to participate in the public sphere. At the same time, it has also resulted in the commodification of news as, on many occasions, media producers publish trivial news with dramatized content" (Neyazi, 2010: 920). Samudra Gupta Kashyap argues that news has always been "Guwahati centric. Every channel from 6 pm broadcasts programmes like Guwahati Live, Guwahati Guwahati, Guwahati Metro etc. But there is need for that as Guwahati is an important centre in terms of everything. Guwahati is a big news maker; any foreigner who comes to North east comes to Guwahati first." Pranjal Phukan adds "yes, today none of the channels in Assam can claim that they have been able to highlight the problems of the

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[35] Mancachar, Namphake and Hailkandi are three extreme points of Assam, and the interviewee meant interiors of the state by the analogy.

people of the nook and corner of the state. But yes they have been trying." Such is the fear of going down the untrodden path that media in Assam have not been able to decentralize its content. Some blame it on the ignorance of the people; others say the level of illiteracy is too high.

Samudra Gupta Kashyap agrees "no that (localization) didn't happen. That is why so many papers. The period when literacy had grown and people had become more aware and hungry for information, that was the time when the three original newspapers were not reaching the districts and the communities to reflect everybody's view point or everybody's issues or concerns. That gap was sought to be filled up by other people but they didn't put an effort to fill up those gaps." The gaps could not be filled even by the electronic media. The 24x7 channels had their own agenda to pursue. The editors could not see beyond the Guwahati. The development function of the media remains only an idealistic vision.

4.8 Journalism as Profession

On October 4, 2013, the employees of the Prime Channel, a 24x7 news channel of Assam staged a protest with black cloth on their mouths against the sudden closure of the channel. The closure is not the first such case in the history of media in Assam. 2013 also saw the closure of '*Sakalbela*', a Bengali daily published from Guwahati, Seven Sisters Post belonging to the same corporate house and '*Dainik Pratibimba*', an assamese daily published from Guwahati. In all the cases the closure was sudden and left scores of employees with a bleak future. Around 170 employees lost jobs in Prime News channel, and around 200 employees of the Saradha group working for Seven Sisters Post and *Sakalbela* were left jobless. 2014 has already seen the closing down of a Bengali daily *Sangbad Lahiri* from April 1, run by the Shillong Times group of

Meghalaya. This sort of situation does not give confidence to budding journalists. Even if they are considered rare incidents, still for journalists the scenario does not look bright.

News Time Assam has already changed hands from Rose Valley group to the *Pratidin* group. Prime News before its shut down was sold by *Jeevan Surakhya* group after two years of operation to Brahmaputra Infrastructure private limited, a real estate firm. DY365 although has been running since 2008, has had huge shift in its programming policy. It has completely stopped producing programmes in Hindi, English and Bengali, suggesting a change in its marketing policy. North East television the oldest satellite television which boasted of transmitting programme in record number of regional languages and dialects also faced temporary closure after internal fight over the control of the channel. This sort of development can never be a source of confidence to the journalist community in Assam.

Samudra Gupta Kashyap talking on the wage situation says "except for the Assam Tribune group and *Prantik* Magazine others do not have a structured salary or wage structure as such. So, everybody is insecure, except the Assam Tribune people all are insecure. They do not have benefits they do not have the benefits that come with a systematized salary structure. They do not have a mechanism within their media houses where they undergo in service training or orientation or refresher periodically. This I am talking about staffers and the desk people. And all those who are outside the state capital are poor stringers, very ill-paid. They get centimeter wise, how many centimeter of news have you generated. So these people mostly do local blackmailing."

Paragmoni Aditya says with News Live's arrival electronic media wages have improved "one thing more we (News Live) are paying regular salary to the staff and correspondents who are outside Guwahati and are

full fledged employee. Earlier in print media the correspondent used to get paid according to publication. Now we pay salary, and the correspondent is bound to report at any time whether it is 3 or 4 am 10 Celsius or 42 Celsius, he has to go where I command. Most of the television channels also do not follow this model till date."

Santanu Bhuyan agrees about the hardships of journalists in Assam "people are passing out from Universities with Mass communication degrees they don't have that dedication. Even if they are dedicated, after passing out sustenance is quite tough. It's not all about money. The market is also not conducive, after the coming of electronic media the situation has improved a bit." In fact electronic media has given hope to not only journalists but also a gamut of people associated with the process like camerapersons, editors, anchors. Their demand for personnel in the context of a fixed supply of, trained journalists has effectively widened the pool of media labor to include subjects from social backgrounds that hitherto would have excluded them from employment in the print media industry, where the minimum requirements of higher education and even literacy were met, historically, by a narrow group of national and regional elites (Rudra, 1989).

Samudra Gupta Kashyap points out that "there is lot of people waiting on the wings to become journalists. Students particularly in the small institutes, self styled journalism institutes, almost 18 to 20 in Guwahati. They are fleecing these people who are coming from the interiors and studying mass communication in Guwahati." As Roy (2011: 767) says from the perspective of demand and supply equilibrium alone, the growth of the television news industry has necessitated an expansion of existing labor pools, and a concomitant revision of hiring practices in the historically elite, 'intellectual' profession of journalism.

Since the 1990's a total of 19 journalists have been killed in Assam. Reporting from a state where militancy was rampant in the 1990's the reporters faced risk of lives at every step. It is no wonder that most of these journalists were killed by one or the other militant group. Parag Das was an executive editor of *Asomiya Pratidin* at the time of his killing, and it is fairly open knowledge that he was an ULFA ideologue. The second editor killed earlier this year was the owner of a newspaper known to be a mouthpiece of the ULFA when he bought it (Ninan, 2009). Anil Mazumdar, the Editor of *Aji* was gunned down in Guwahati city itself.

4.9 Television Rating Points (TRP's)

After the entry of News Live and DY365, the race for revenues has heated up. So, the need for a separate rating agency was felt. The advertisers too did not have any reliable means of gauging where they were putting their money in. Media in Assam is completely dependent on the advertising revenue. The closure of Prime News is a case in point, where it could not sustain itself without advertising. Prime News was not available on any Direct to Home (DTH) platform and thus had to rely on local cable networks for distribution. For this purpose the cable networks charge a huge sum as carriage fees. In September, 2013 Prime News was totally blacked out by the cable operators for three weeks as the carriage fees was unpaid. The television ratings virtually bottomed out and advertising were hard to come by. As there was no other source of revenue other than advertisements, the channel faced closure. This complex gamut of media operations in Assam says a lot about the clout of advertisers, Television Rating Points (TRP's) and cable networks.

But, Samudra Gupta Kashyap criticizes the concept of TRP's "they do not know who the audiences are. They do not have a mechanism of

TRP. Although everybody talks about it there is no system. You cannot create this all on hearsay and guesswork that advertisement this is popular and this is not popular. There is Television Audience Measurement, but I have not seen any machine yet. So they randomly try to find out who are speaking about what. So the content has been more politically driven because most of these people have instantly become journalists producing news. They do not have a content schedule as such." Media often compete with one another. There are numerous examples every day in the press of what Edwin Newman has called 'flagrant examples of cheap scare journalism' (Schmuhl, 1989).

There is criticism from the industry itself, TRP is often construed as something which can be bought for money. Anybody willing to spend money can increase their TRP's. News Times's Pratap Bordoloi opines "TRP is only Guwahati specific if there are 2 lakh people watching television only 150 TRP box are there, how it is justified? And there are some middlemen who manage TRP's. Some people who came when we started said if you pay one crore we will make you no. 1 in 1-2 months. After I rejected I saw the result instead, my TRPs went down then again slowly it went up due to the efforts of my staff." How much of it happens is an arguable matter, but the future of the channels depends on these data.

With a population of over 30 million spread over 29 districts Assam is a multifarious land. Whereas the TRP data is gathered only from Guwahati as Pranjal Phukan opines "Guwahati based news get more priority during prime time, because there is something called TRP's related with it. Although TRP should be supported or not is a contentious issue, media managers are concerned with it as advertisement revenue depends on it. Satellite channels in Assam are free-to-air channels, and to keep these channels functioning a big amount is required and advertisement are the only source of income for the channels, these advertisements agencies look at the TRP's to award advertisements, so the

channels are dependent on TRP's. So, if the channels don't go after TRP's there will be lesser advertisements, revenue would come down as a result shutting of channels." He cites the Achilles heels of the present system of running satellite channels in Guwahati. Even if the channels want they cannot reach the interior areas of the state, or the financial commonsense dissuades them from doing so. Because it is Guwahati which brings in the revenues, it is Guwahati where the advertisers are situated and it is in Guwahati where all the TRP boxes are located.

Print media professionals have always questioned the credibility of news of the television media. They accuse the television media to be driven by TRP and consequently advertising revenue, which compromises the quality of journalism. Prasanta Rajguru argues "electronic media is going very high as per as unhealthy practices are concerned. Again the corporate control is coming to the fore. It is all about TRP's. TRP's bring revenue so it is encouraged each time."

Santanu Bhuyan of the now defunct Prime News says "our (Prime News) main idea was, will we be able to do something different from what the other channels are doing in Assam. Now you will see that small issues are inflated and presented but if you look at our programming we pay more focus on content. We are not in the TRP race. TRP is also important, if you don't think about TRP's, running a channel is impossible. Still now we are making content our prime focus." He agrees to inflated news stories but his argument that they do not care about TRP's is a misnomer, we now know the fate of Prime News not able to sustain itself due top lack of revenues.

4.10 The Way Forward

The media scenario in Assam is still in an evolutionary phase where media organizations are passing through a phase of consolidation. Barring a few hiccups, the emergence of the electronic media has been smooth. Journalists shifting jobs with better prospects has become commonplace, and one point of time lot of senior professional left their print sector jobs to join the electronic media. News media has led the growth of media in Assam, like other parts of the country. New audience has been created with the emergence of multiple edition newspapers, and electronic media has reached interior villages of the state. News media has in fact been the driving force for media's growth across the country as can be seen from Table 2.

Year	No. of news channels	Total no. of channels	% of total channels
2000	1	1	100
2001	39	44	89
2002	15	24	62
2003	12	24	50
2004	10	28	36
2005	10	15	67
2006	28	39	72
2007	29	74	53
2008	59	152	39
2009	33	79	42
2010	22	47	47
2000-2010	268	527	51

Table 2: Consolidated list of news channels in India, 2000–10

Source: Government of India, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (2010).

Radhika Mohan Bhagwati says in the same breath "so, the qualities of the editors should not be academic but they should be good business managers. So MBA would be the qualification for a future editor. In Assam we are doing the same and going away from the tradition. The people of Assam and North East have the capacity to support more print and electronic media they are supporting newspapers in Assam. But we are not giving them back the desired product per se. We are giving them some stuff for our benefit. I am hopeful and disappointed at the same time. If we can rise up to the challenges then we can give the public sphere what they aspire for." He is optimistic about the growth of media as a whole in the region and thinks it to be the purpose of the media to contribute to a healthy public sphere in the context of the liberalized economy.

Yet at the same time the commercialization troubles him and he bemoans the fall in importance of the public in the ideals of modern day journalism. Localization for him is a utopian concept where the public sphere becomes a commercialized entity. "The societal condition has completely changed in Assam particularly. You can divide the society pre and post 1998. The whole world impact (globalization) is coming to us. In the freedom movement in 1942 press was important. But after the Assam agitation things became different. The role for the society and the public has enlarged. Media is a public space and print has given the people that space. But this has changed post print. Electronic medium has taken away the space" says Radhika Mohan Bhagwati.

With the emergence of electronic media, news media in particular Assam transformed itself from a print society to a post-print set up. By creating a new constituency of readerships, localization has provided a voice for those who, until recently, were unable to effectively raise their concerns in the public sphere and remained at the margin of mainstream discourse (Neyazi, 2010: 920). The growth has indeed been driven by the

multiple editions that the newspapers started in the early 2000's in Assam. And after the emergence of satellite television, media reached the nook and corner of the state. A new audience emerged, people living in Mancachar in Dhubri to the hills of Dima Hasao, from the bordering villages of Bangladesh in Cachar to the interior villages bordering Arunachal Pradesh, from the intellectual and educated society to the illiterate, from the middle class to the labourers nobody was untouched by the electronic media. But the creation of the audience did not ensure their participation. As we have seen in the case of Assam, localization meant a local audience but centralized content. The content of media remained biased towards Guwahati, both in print and electronic media. The forces of the market required a larger audience for profits, yet it did not want to make content for them. The 'local' became only a place to dump 'globalised' products in the terms of the new economic world order. The 'local' in Assam did not find a voice and a medium of its own.

Chapter five

Local Cable Channels: The Wired Site of 'the Local'

5.1 Framework for Cable Television Regulation in India

The Indian legal system had the Indian Telegraph Act of 1885 as the only piece of legislation to fall back on in cases regarding the media. The Act was an archaic piece of British regulation that had remained unchanged, like many other such regulations. Thus post 1947 the Article 19[36] of the Indian constitution formed the basis for many judgments on matters relating to the press. The advent of broadcasting medium and spurt in media activity called for reform in the legislation process. In the year 1991, the economic policy of India in what is well documented now underwent a metamorphosis, liberalization of the economic environment happened. Global products came nearer home and Coca Cola was no more a taboo. During the Gulf war CNN became the source of information. Only a handful of cable channels actually beamed into India viz. CNN, BBC, MTV etc. These were all channels that were produced and uplinked from foreign locations and beamed through satellites into India. Doordarshan[37] (DD), the government broadcaster was available only through terrestrial mode. To accommodate the satellite channels a network was necessary to transmit signals to people's home through cables. Zee Television promoted by the Essel group became the first satellite channel of India. Thus the initial cable networks in the metros grew and they could transmit only limited channels. Before the

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[36] The Article 19 of the Indian Constitution of India provides for Right to Freedom, and one among them is the Right to freedom of speech and expression.

[37] Although Television started in India in 1959 it was only on an experimental basis. National telecast by Doordarshan started only in the year 1982, and remained the sole television provider till the arrival of cable television.

introduction of cable television in India, broadcasting was solely under the control of the State. 'The Government of India was caught unprepared with the emergence of cable networks and broadcasting through satellites in the early 1990s' (Ghosh, 2013: 01). By 1992 cable networks were adding thousand of homes per month, the demand led to proliferation of cable networks across the country. Thus, unlike the western countries India saw cable networks grow rather than terrestrial transmission. DD was the only channel which had access to terrestrial network and satellite channels had to use cable networks for distribution. Unlike western countries where terrestrial networks was much more popular and private broadcaster transmitted through them in India it was under government control.

DD no longer had the kind of monopoly that it had, it faced increasing competition from the satellite channels. Media liberalization in India stems from multiple acts of omission, that is, the state's non-intervention in the social-political terrain charted by the availability of new technologies such as satellite broadcasting, rather than from a policy decision to end the state's monopoly on broadcast news or to dismantle existing regulatory frameworks (Chatterji, 1991; Mehta, 2008). The explosive growth of private media in India made the government rethink its stance on legislation and finally we see the introduction of Prasar Bharati Act, 1990; Cable Television Network (Regulation) Act, 1995; The Broadcasting Bill of 1997; and The Communications Bill, 2000.

5.1.1 Airwaves as Public Property (Supreme Court Judgment, 1995)

In one of the most landmark judgment in the history of Indian media, the Supreme Court in the case Ministry of Information and Broadcasting vs. Cricket Association Bengal passed the verdict that airwaves were public

property and should be used for public good. Till that time there were no clear regulations on airwaves and existing legislations were inadequate as the Supreme Court judgment notes:

> The Indian Telegraph Act, 1885 is totally inadequate to govern an important medium like the radio and television, i.e., broadcasting media. The Act was intended for an altogether different purpose when it was enacted. This is the result of the law in this country not keeping pace with the technological advances in the field of information and communications. While all the leading democratic countries have enacted laws specifically governing the broadcasting media, the law in this country has stood still, rooted in the Telegraph Act of 1885 (1995: 228).

In the year 1993 the Board of Control for Cricket in India had called for bids for broadcast rights of the Hero Cup, a cricket tournament to be played in India. In the international bid, Trans-World International (TWI), a foreign firm won the broadcasting rights to the tournament defeating among others bids by DD. On the eve of the tournament DD tried to stop the broadcast of the match by denying TWI to uplink live matches from India. Consequently the case went to the Supreme Court where in an interim order was passed whereby DD was allowed to telecast matches in India and TWI to the foreign countries. Later, after the Hero Cup was over the case was taken up and judgment was passed. Some of the important points made by Justice Reddy and Justice Sawant (1995) in this case are:

a) Airwaves constitute public property and must be utilized for advancing public good. No individual has a right to utilize them at his choice and pleasure and for purposes of his choice including profit (pg. 226).

b) DD or All India Radio (AIR) has no monopoly in the matter of telecasting/broadcasting. Radio and television are only a medium through which freedom of speech and expression is expressed (pg. 226).

c) The right of free speech and expression includes the right to receive and impart information. For ensuring the free speech right of the citizens of this country, it is necessary that the citizens have the benefit of plurality of views and a range of opinions on all public issues (pg. 228).

The judges found it unacceptable that broadcast media can be monopolized both by private and government agencies. It was against the ideals enshrined in Article 19 of the constitution. The judgment gave importance to the listeners/viewers rights to receive information. The legislation in India was inadequate, and thus both the judges drew examples of broadcast media regulations and freedom of expression ideals from around the world, to come to a judgment. Thus, from the notion of government property, it transformed to public property and media regulations came to be seen from that perspective. DD and AIR were government run entities and after the judgment the question of autonomy came into the limelight. The judgment paved the way for the next phase of reforms in the Indian broadcasting sector.

5.1.2 Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act, 1995

This regulation came into existence in 1994 to regulate the hitherto unregulated growth of the Indian cable sector. The cable revolution had already happened and the government was unprepared to meet the challenges of this sector. DD was only available through terrestrial mode and that is where the government had its monopoly. Co-axial wires carrying multiple channels was something Indian legislation had not

foreseen. This regulation laid down guidelines for registration and transmission of cable channels. "The object of the Act [Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act, 1995] was to regulate the 'haphazard mushrooming of cable television networks'. Due to the lack of licensing mechanism for cable operators; this resulted in large number of cable operators, broadcasting programmes without any regulation (Ghosh, 2013: 01).

For the registration which was now mandatory an application for registration of cable operator has to be done along with a payment of fees decided from time to time to the Head Post Master of the designated Head Post Office of the area, within whose territorial jurisdiction the cable operator is situated. The registration certificate thus issued by the registering authority after inspection is valid for 12 months and can be renewed. This simple process was put in place and the process of registration was made decentralized.

Some of the important points that were addressed in the Act were the a) registration b) programme code c) advertisement code d) maintenance of register e) compulsory transmission of DD channels f) non-interference with other telecommunication networks. The Act also laid the norm for nature of offences and punishments under it, and gave power to the administration to act in matters of public interest. The programme code makes it mandatory through an amendment for 'Every cable operator shall, from the commencement of the Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Amendment Act, 2000, re-transmit at least two Doordarshan terrestrial channels and one regional language channel' [Cable Television Networks (Regulations) Act, clause 8, 1995]

The Act also made it mandatory to keep a register. It states:

Every cable operator shall maintain a register in the prescribed form indicating therein in brief the programmes transmitted or re-transmitted through the cable service during a month and such register shall be maintained by the cable operator for a period of one year after the actual transmission or re-transmission of the said programmes. [Cable Television Networks (Regulations) Act, clause 7, 1995]

Under clauses 19 and 20 of the Act the government had laid rules for the intervention of administration to either bar any programme or even prohibit from functioning:

Power to prohibit transmission of certain programmes in public interest.—Where [any authorized officer] , thinks it necessary or expedient so to do in the public interest, he may, by order, prohibit any cable operator from transmitting or re-transmitting ... **Power to prohibit operation of cable television network in public interest.**— Where the Central Government thinks it necessary or expedient so to do in public interest, it may prohibit the operation of any cable television network in such areas as it may...[Cable Television Networks (Regulations) Act, clauses 19-20, 1995]

The Act (1995) prescribed for programme codes and advertisement code as were prevalent for DD and AIR. The Act was the first step towards regulating the content and transmission of Indian and foreign channels by the broadcasters. Although there were several amendments to the Act later on, the structure of the Act remained same. It is in the light of this legislation that over the next decade and half cable television witnessed exponential growth in the market and flourished. Cable Operators now functioned under the purview of the law and the business was driven by prospects of profit. Cable Television has made deep inroads into the political economy of urban and semi-urban lives. The ongoing consolidation within the industry has been accompanied by high levels of volatility, seen equally in the all-too-common allegations of the

use of force between rival companies and operators, as well as in the high rate of mergers and acquisitions observed at different levels within the cable business (Naregal, 2010: 291).

5.2 Local Cable Operator (LCO) and Multi System Operator (MSO)

Satellite channels transmit signals which are accessed by MSO's and the LCO's buy these signals from the MSO's and relay it to the consumers. Each MSO has under it several LCO's and in some case if the MSO is owned by corporate houses, there might be hundred of LCO's under it. In 2012, the government made it mandatory for the MSO's to receive and relay signals and no LCO could downlink and transmit signals. That way the government could have better control over the MSO's. In the case of MSOs, no resources are allotted by the Government for their operations. 'And there are no restrictions on the number of MSOs which operate in a market, monopolistic tendencies are observed in some States' (TRAI, 2013: 14). The MSO's are in reality jumbo cable operators who have grown in size to achieve the economies of scale. The cable revolution in India has for the major part been driven by the MSO's but large corporate MSO's have also resulted in unhealthy practices.

State	Cable TV homes (% of all India Cable TV homes)
Andhra Pradesh	15
Assam	1
Bihar	3
Delhi	5

Gujarat	6
Haryana	3
Karnataka	9
Kerala	4
Maharashtra & Goa	13
MP & Chhattisgarh	6
Orissa	1
Punjab & HP	3
Rajasthan	3
Tamil Nadu	14
UP & Uttarakhand	6
West Bengal	8

Table 3: Distribution of Cable TV Homes

Source: TRAI Consultation Paper on "Tariff issues related to Cable TV Services in Non-CAS Areas" dated 25th March 2010.

The cable television has been an analogue phenomenon since its inception where signals are transmitted traditionally through co-axial cables or optical cables. But through an amendment to the Cable Television Networks Regulation Act, in 2011 the government has made it mandatory for cable operators to transmit or re-transmit signals digitally encrypted through a Digital Addressable System (DAS). These digital signals would be encrypted at the audiences' home with a set top box. The process of digitization has been divided into four phases depending on geography. As Veena Naregal points out:

> Despite evident signs of consolidation and ruthless competition, local cable operators continue to work on an informal basis. Undoubtedly, urban congestion and the difficulties of technical monitoring are contributory factors. Reliable estimates of reach and market share are,

therefore, hard to come by in the cable distribution business. For all practical purposes, both companies and local operators seem to work with two parallel sets of claimed figures: subscriber bases are inflated for publicity purposes and for the benefit of advertisers, but for the purposes of bargaining over dues either with government agencies or broadcasting entities, declared connectivity tends to be grossly underplayed (2010: 300).

Although the process has seen lot of hiccups and delays the last day has been fixed on December 31, 2014 to finish the last stage of the process. The process of digitization would enable the government to keep a tab on the number of consumers; hiding the numbers from government and the channels would become a thing of the past.

The above discussion on the regulatory framework provides the direction that cable revolution took, without legislation in the initial years and under the gaze of government eyes later on. The rise of the LCO's made media in India a decentralized entity, where the neigbourhood guy was responsible for what we watch and how we do it. I now try to analyze through two case studies the role these operators have played in the localization of the media process, by operating local channels in their neighbourhood, and contributed to the emergent media of Assam.

5.3 Case Studies

On April 28, 2012, two professors from Tezpur University met with an accident on National Highway 37, near Kaliabor in Nagaon district. The news was flashed by the satellite television channels within a few minutes in the form of running news ticker. This piece of news subsequently, did not go beyond the ticker of the satellite channels. But within a few hours, one of the local cable channel (LCC) of Nagaon, 'Nagaon Talks' had the

visuals of the accident up and running. This incident brings into focus the reach and content of the LCC's. What is missed by the satellite channels might be important in a local context. In an era where communication technologies are becoming commonplace and information is demanded instantaneously, the idea of Guwahati as the news center seems distant. The 'local' has emerged as the site for creation and dissemination of information.

Assam today has around 250 registered LCO's and MSO's. Every town has one or more LCO who compete with each other for the share of households. In some case, a single locality has two operators existing. Larger towns generally have MSO's and have many cable operators under them. Cable networks originated in the early 1990's, and ever since have vied for space with the state run DD. The influx of numerous satellite channels in the late 1990's saw the popularity of such network grow and every person of considerable economic and political clout opened a network.

In this section I analyse the functioning and growth of two such local cable channels (LCC) run by cable networks in Silchar and Dibrugarh in Assam. LCC's are not a new phenomenon in India, and most cable networks have one. The most popular form of such channels is ones which plays songs and movies. During the initial years of the cable television entertainment channels showing popular Bolywood songs and films were rare, and these local channels catered to that need. Movies were also screened in some of these channels at specific hours, and the best part of having a LCO was the convenience of calling up and requesting for a particular movie. And more often than not these requests were obliged with and thus the popularity of these channels soared. In the process cable networks came to be identified with the channels that they had of their own, a recipe for enhancing the number of subscribers. Cable networks faced intense competition from rival networks and the only way

to resist it was value added services, the local cable channels served that end. In course of time some of larger networks and MSO's, people who could afford, opened cable news channels too. These channels would be the one stop destination for all kinds of local events that would be happening in the area. The area of collecting news therefore would remain the boundaries of the reach of the network. Therefore the existence of the channels would be symbiotic to the network itself. The local news bulletin was something innovative, and also earned extra revenue through local advertisements. "By insisting and sometimes even supplying footage of a local event, such as a cricket match, inauguration of a public amenity or a celebrity visit to the area, they (LCO) can have these items included in the evening news bulletin. This may be a way of getting personal publicity for himself or of rising in the estimation of the local boss; either way, it was a practice that the MSOs encouraged during the early days to cultivate local contacts and expand their networks" (Naregal, 2010: 303).

The race to give something extra to the consumers and also the lure of advertisements led to such local channels coming up in most of the towns of Assam. In most cases it would not be full blown channels, the cost for such a set up was prohibitive, but 30 minutes to 1 hour packages that would be made daily, re-telecasted several times over the day.

5.4 Barak Television Network (BTN)

BTN Cable is a major MSO for the Barak valley region of Assam. Situated at Silchar, the capital of Cachar district, BTN cable is located strategically in the commercial hub of the region. Cachar district is located in the southernmost part of Assam. Administratively divided into two subdivisions viz. Silchar (Sadar) and Lakhipur, Cachar district occupies an area of 3,786 square kilometers. According to the 2011

census, Cachar has a population of 1,736,319 and a sex ratio of 958 females for every 1000 males. It boasts of a literacy rate of 80.36% higher than the national average. Bengali is the official language in the district with majority of the people primarily speaking Bengali.

Silchar, is the district headquarters of Cachar. It is 343 kilometres south east of the state capital Guwahati. It is the second largest town of the state in terms of population. As of 2011, Silchar had a population of 178,865.
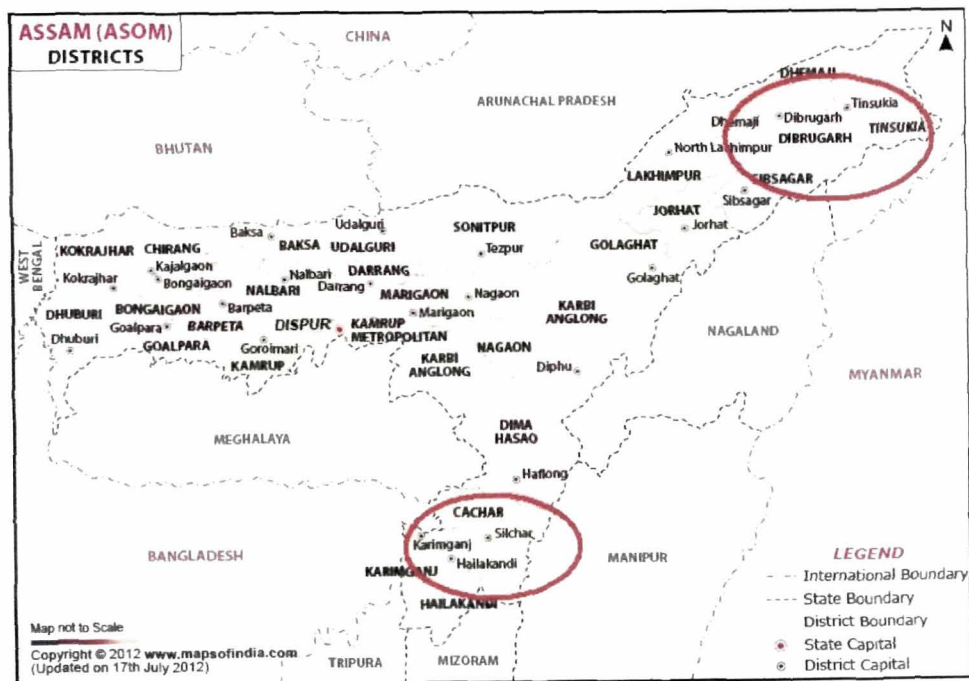
Figure 1: Map of Assam (study areas highlighted)

Source: www.mapsofindia.com

Figure 2: Map of Cachar District

5.4.1 Origin

The network company and the channel were started in 2003. Pre-2003 there was three MSO's in Silchar and finally all the three merged into one company called BTN. One of those networks was called the United Cable Network and they had a local channel called UCN. After United cable Network closed down BTN came into existence. Late 1990's and early 2000's was the period of consolidation and mergers in the cable network space, across the country. Competition had become stiff, and bigger networks were gobbling up the smaller ones and forming larger networks or MSO's. BTN is also a result of such merger between rival networks.

The exact market shares of the MSOs are not available because in the analogue platform the number of subscribers cannot be accurately ascertained due to non-addressability and the lack of transparency in reporting of subscriber base. Once DAS is implemented, the cable TV services will have to be provided through a set top box and it will be possible to obtain the exact number of customers through the subscriber management system of the MSO.

5.4.2 Reach

BTN is an example of a large cable distribution network and therefore such companies harbour the hope of growing further. As in the case of another cable channel operating in Guwahati, Prag News has been one of the largest in reach in lower Assam region of the state. And recently in 2013 it succeeded in becoming a satellite television channel. Monish Das one among the two directors of BTN says "there was a lot of hope and ambition for us. We hoped to start off as a local channel and slowly and gradually grow to become a satellite channel. But being in a small town there are lot of problems. Broadcasting from Silchar, the kind of money that is required to run a satellite channel, enough revenue won't be generated to be sustainable. Thus we abandoned the plan and have stuck to local news. The geographical area that we (network) reach is covered by our news coverage. Today we reach almost 80% of the household of the Cachar district." For all purposes opening a satellite channel based in district towns is impractical. All the revenue comes from Guwahati and satellite channels in turn have to be dependent on cable distribution networks to reach the people across the state, which is costly. We have seen what happened to Prime News (chapter IV) when it failed to provide the cable networks the distribution charge. For, smaller towns that way it makes commercial sense to stick to its area of operation. The cost of channel distribution is free as such channels belong to the network themselves. The only cost they bear is the cost of hiring extra people for the news production and presentation process.

5.4.3 Revenue

Local cable channels (LCC) such as BTN have to rely on local markets for revenue. The larger the area of coverage more is the opportunity to

garner advertisements. Advertisements although is a major issue for these local networks, they are impeded by their smaller reach to get big clients. Small advertisements which include anything from coaching centers, swimming classes, birthday wishes, anniversary wishes, inaugurations, local events, astrologers, doctors etc. form the bulk of such advertisements. These advertisements are mostly in the form of banners on top and bottom of the screen, and also running tickers which are booked on normally a weekly basis. These kinds of advertisements are generally textual advertisements, and some cases may even carry smaller images. Interestingly, this sort of advertisements which are the staple of local cable channels which have become popular on the web are also seen on satellite television, especially during cricket matches. Normal advertisements that we see on television are also made and have become popular on LCC of late. With the easy availability of technology and trained people making advertisements have become easier. The LCC themselves double up as the advertisement agencies giving complete solution to the customers, right from production to equipment to distribution all in a package. These advertisements again are not sold on time slots but on weekly basis, the more the money you pay the longer it runs and the frequency increases too.

Monish Das says "there is not much profit as earlier times. You have to pay the pay channels. What has happened with advertising in BTN is that with the upcoming satellite channels from Guwahati all the big companies are giving them advertisement. Earlier in the absence of these satellite channels the advertising used to come to us, now we have lost it. You see all the companies have their offices in Guwahati where the advertisement revenues are generated. The satellite channels get all that." Although he points out to the loss of revenue from big industrial clients based in Guwahati, the clients know what they get when they advertise through BTN. The coverage area is defined by the distribution company, and whenever any company has to launch any product targeting this

specific audience, BTN becomes the default choice. As Neyazi says (2010: 921) "vernacular modernity has enabled both media producers and consumers to claim cultural autonomy."

They provide a specific known market unlike the satellite channels where the target population is not defined; nobody knows who watches those advertisements as TRP is available only for Guwahati city. So, any client who wants to target specific area knows which LCC's to advertise in. BTN is today the largest MSO in the Cachar district and its reach ensures local advertisements and revenues.

5.4.4 Programming

Martin Esslin talking about the idea of television genres says:

> the language of television is none other than that of drama: that television—as indeed the cinema with which it has much in common— is, in its essence, a dramatic medium; and that looking at TV from the point of view and with the analytic tools of dramatic criticism and theory might contribute to a better understanding of its nature and many aspects of its psychological, social, and cultural impact, both in the short term and on a long term, macroscopic time scale (1982: 6-7).

The purpose of genres in LCC's is double fold. Firstly, to become conduits of entertainment, localization of the existing genre of television programming and secondly, to connect with the people and keep them hooked, audiences who are also consumers of their networks. This two pronged evolution has defined how in the initial days of LCC's it was only about bolywood song and dance videos and occasional movie screenings, and how it later evolved to interactive programming and reality shows. The LCC might be considered to be the early starters of reality programmes when they would cover local events, school functions and neighbourhood competitions.

The Director of BTN explains their programming thus "we have live talk shows on health, where doctors answer to the queries directly which the viewers ask by telephone, we have dance and song programme by kids, also we organize programme by local artists, we go out on the streets and parks to record. We also have live shows like during *Durga Puja*, the *Dashami* festivities, Republic Day, some renowned artists programme are also telecasted live. Among the local viewers the popularity of BTN is huge, and that is the reason people are still not converting to Direct to Home (DTH), this local touch is absent in DTH." And this local touch that he talks about is the growth centers of new culture. Peter Manuel's work shows, cassette culture opened new markets, produced new artists and music forms, and hugely expanded the market. Both in production and circulation, cassette culture stood at the borderline of the property regime, a feature that clearly anticipated the form the 'global' decade of the 1990s would take (Sundaram, 2005: 56). LCC's created new genres, and new stars, who the audience could relate to. These new breed of artists who became known through their neighbourhood performances opened up new markets and cultural forms.

The local thus emerged as the site of popular culture, encouraged by LCC's. Localization has definitely helped hitherto marginalized groups to participate in the public sphere (Neyazi, 2010: 920). Local festivals such as *Durga Puja* are covered live on BTN and become important spaces for public gathering. The public is formed on television through BTN and the channel becomes an important conduit for people's expression of festivity and joy throughout the area of coverage of the LCC.

5.4.5 Threat from DTH

DTH television was introduced in India in 2003. Dish TV led by the Zee TV group was the first service provider in the country. In the initial years

of operation DTH was not a threat as it was costly compared to a connection from LCO's. Dish TV as part of its marketing strategy in the initial years also stayed away from the metros and concentrated on the rural sectors where LCO were weak or where they did not reach. Analog cable service was always hindered by its limitation to reach remote area by cables. DTH could provide only 48 channels when it first started out in comparison to the average of 60 channels that any LCO provided. By the end of 2005 DTH could garner only one percent of the total television household in India. This was a dismal figure for the DTH players. But by 2013, with six big players in the fray and an average of 200 channels DTH has penetrated into 23 million household and around 23 percent of all television household in India. LCO were at increasing risk of losing out to competition that they could not take on economically.

Monish Das accepts the challenge "yes, there is competition. Earlier we could just play any song or movie through our channel, but now we have to go from street to street and make programmes to keep up the popularity of the channel. We have to visit and make programmes on *Durga Puja*[38] or say *Id* or Christmas, the coming of DTH has made us to do this sort of programmes. And due to this popularity of it (BTN) hasn't faced any threat from DTH." Survival depends on innovation and adaptation for the LCO's. During the late 1990's and early 2000's when the LCO's were at the peak of the television revolution in India, they were run on whimsical decisions. Every unemployed youth with money wanted to open a cable network, every politician wanted to invest in one and LCO's had to keep people in power happy for they had to collect money from people and operate without any hindrance. Thus, LCO's became powerful people in society, they could hike subscription fees whenever they liked, disconnect people's connections on late payments, force people to pay up for extra channels and so on. For the most part television distribution remained extremely fragmented; cable was largely retailed by

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[38] *Durga Puja* and *Bihu* are the two major festivals celebrated in Assam.

smaller independent players in the neighbourhood, which frustrated efforts to corporatize as in other countries. 'Cable television had actually grown through local ownership (local youth wired their locality and took feed from satellites), who would collect money from consumers' (Sundaram, 2005: 56). But there was no alternative to the neighbourhood LCO. Only when they started to face competition that things started to improve.

Cable TV subscribers constitute approximately 60% of the total TV homes in the country, whereas the share of DTH is about 35% (see Figure 3). Cable TV networks on the other hand operate on a regional basis and can choose channels to be supplied according to the demand in the area served (TRAI, 2013: 12).
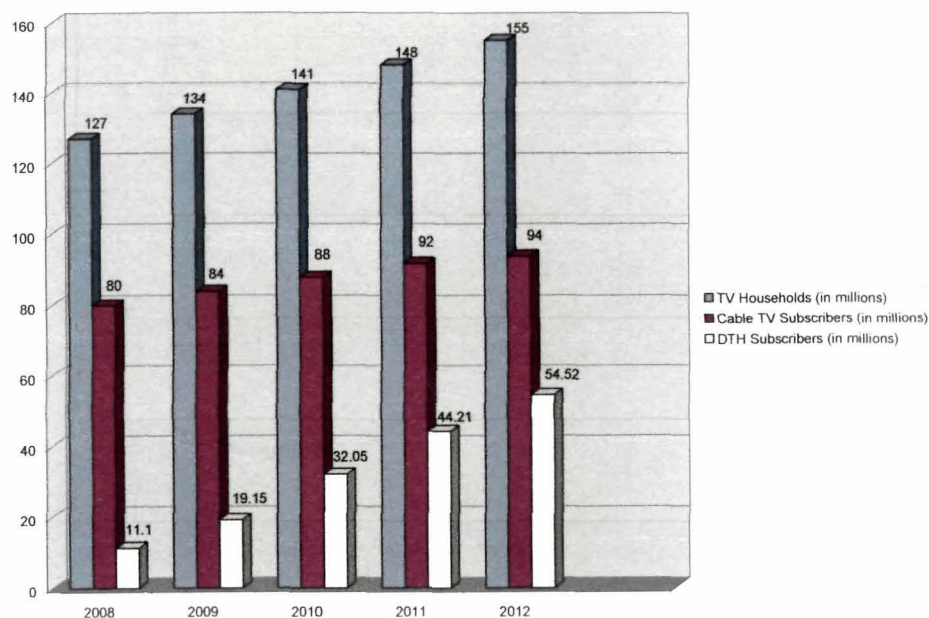

Figure 3: Growth of Cable TV and DTH Subscribers in India
Source: TRAI Consultation Paper on Monopoly Market Dominance in Cable TV Service, 2013

5.4.6 News Production Process

BTN has a unique way of collecting news from the ground. It has a few reporters of its own who are actually videographers who are always on standby to collect news. The concept of journalists is replaced with video journalists and he/she doubles up as the reporter. But that is as much as the town area of Silchar is concerned. Outside Silchar in different parts of the district BTN depends on the LCO's for news. "We have full time reporters who report. But in places outside the town like Sonai, Dhalai etc, it is the operator in those places who collect news. In the town we also use the reporters of our sister concern the newspaper *Dainik Prantajyoti*. So even in midnight anything happens our reporters are there. Here is a flow of information from *Dainik Prantajyoti* to BTN and vice versa" says Monish Das. BTN, due to this unique arrangement, gathers news at a fraction of the cost, and without the necessity of managing numerous reporters. The LCO's who have news collectors provide it to BTN in return for the free transmission of BTN which acts like a value added service.

Infact, taking advantage of this BTN has ventured into the print sector with the publication of its Bengali daily *Dainik Prantajyoti* in the year 2009. Monish Das reveals that there is a flow of information between the organizations. Whatever comes to *Prantajyoti* is used by BTN and vice versa. As a matter of fact both the organization is housed in the same building. *Dainik Prantajyoti* is a broadsheet daily publication of 12 pages with Paresh Dutta, a veteran journalist as its editor.

But unlike the streamlined process in the print daily the editorial process in BTN is elementary to say the least. The editor also acts as the anchor and the script writer. The news editor at best is a person who in the first shift acts as the local reporter too. Journalism in the process is not the important thing but putting together a package of local events and

happenings becomes the motto. It's after all the purpose of the channel that is more important to BTN than the journalistic process itself. The Hindi term *jugaad,* which literally means 'getting by', 'making do', or 'improvising', is an appropriate description of the dynamics of Indian media liberalization (Roy, 2011: 765).

"First the report is brought from the field and dumped in the computer, then the script writer writes the story and then it is given voice over after editing. The Directors have no role, the editor looks after it, if there is any complicated news then they show it to us." The show that is put up is for an hour daily, except on days when there are local events to be produced live. This package is repeated twice on the same day and once the next morning, till the next package is produced. For, all purposes the editor Moni Bhattacharjee remains an editor for the hour only, and the live streaming programmes are unedited feeds.

5.5 V&S Cable Network

Dibrugarh district covers an area of 3,381 square kilometers. According to the 2011 census Dibrugarh district has a population of 1,327,748. It has a population density of 393 inhabitants per square kilometer. Dibrugarh has a literacy rate of 76.22%.

Dibrugarh city is the headquarters of the Dibrugarh district. It is located 439 km. east of Guwahati. It is the gateway to the three tea-producing districts of Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, and Sivasagar. The Brahmaputra passes by the city as it emerges from the mountains of Arunachal Pradesh. Dibrugarh boasts of editions of several state dailies like The Assam Tribune, The Sentinel, *Asomiya Pratidin, Janasadharan, Niyamiya Barta, Dainik Asom* and *Dainik Jugasankha.*
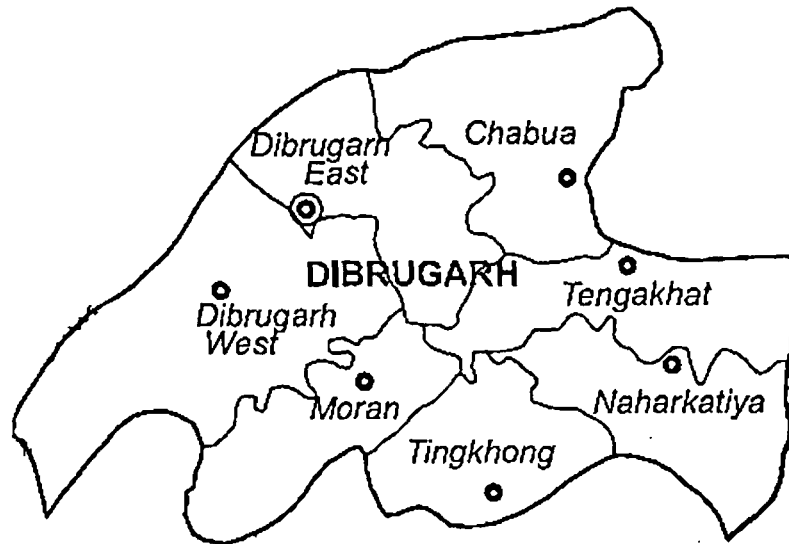
Figure 4: Map of Dibrugarh District

V&S Cable network is a super MSO registered in Tinsukia with their office in Dibrugarh and reaches almost the entire upper Assam districts of Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Sivasagar and Jorhat. With such a vast distribution asset V&S claims itself to be one of the largest in the North East.

5.5.1 Origin

As part of my research I had interviewed the Editor Mr. Chandan Jyoti Kalita of VNS cable (constituent channels of V&S network) channel and also observed the functioning of the Local Cable Channels (LCC) that they run, an important constituent of the distribution network, in an effort to understand the equation between these two entities-the channels and the network.

Mr. Kalita says "we started on July 1, 2009. We have four channels VnS News, *Aamar* VnS is an entertainment channel with local singers and

artists and VnS *Bangla*. In Dakhineswar in Kolkata the rituals that are done there, people of this region can't afford to go there to watch them, so we for the first time started showing those rituals and recitations. They have recording discs there and send them to us and then we telecast. Then we have VnS Cinema, where people request the movies they want to watch, purely on request. VnS News started later only from July 10, 2009. On June 1, 2009 the three channels started together *Aamar* VnS, VnS *Bangla* and VnS Cinema." VnS is today a brand name in the upper Assam region. The fact that it provides a bouquet of channels gives it the edge over other networks. VnS channels started late and was known by other names in its initial years and after several mergers and take over came to be what it is today. 'As rising levels of investment and competition from the big companies have pushed out many operators from the business, local operators in many parts of the country organized themselves to form pressure-groups and even co-operatives at the local and regional level' (Naregal, 2010: 301).

The existence of the distribution networks depended on the identity of those local channels they had. As the networks took shape and got larger in size so too the channels started to get more ambitious and even branch off into niche channels like cinema or language specific content. VnS News is one of the most popular among the channels. The distance between Guwahati and Dibrugarh both geographically and content wise gave ample space for other news channel to grow. Mr. Kalita points out "the logic behind the news channel was that they (satellite channels) are only Guwahati based. They only make news from there; they never show the problems of the people living here. What they do is they make it there and push it to us, the smaller towns. But our target was to make it here and push it to Guwahati, so that the problems that arise here are being heard in Dispur (administrative capital) and this was our main purpose. And it is a success. For e.g. small and far away places such as Lekhapani, Makum etc. their problems are never highlighted or never heard of,

sometimes they never realize places such as those exist. Only during elections people know them." The grudge with Guwahati based satellite news channels is clear; VnS is a means of resisting imported images from power centers. Appadurai and Breckenridge have argued that 'most societies today possess the means for the local production of modernity' (1995: 1).

5.5.2 Reach

Talking about the reach and extent of the network Chandan Kalita says "ours is an underground cable network, which is the largest in the northeast, nowhere else in northeast will you find this big a network. Dibrugarh, Tinsukia, Sivasagar, Jorhat, the entire four districts is covered by us. We also send our programmes to Guwahati with software. In Guwahati, Nalbari, Barpeta, Bongaigaon, Rangiya our programmes are telecasted. Basically we started off with Dibrugarh, Tinsukia and Sivasagar which were our targets. And after that slowly it is expanding." The reach of V&S cable is massive, it has numerous LCO's under it and the four channels it produces are a driving force for its expansion. VnS News caters to news from the four districts, VnS Cinema acts as a movie on demand channel, *Aamar* VnS and VnS *Bangla* are niche channels catering to Assamese and Bengali speaking people respectively. Thus the size and influence of V&S Cable the MSO has been driven by its local content generation. As Sundaram (2005: 56) mentions "by the late 1990s, multi-service providers emerged, pushed by large television networks offering franchises to local players, but this only increased conflict at the local level between rival operators. For the most part cable distribution remains in the informal sector and a source of conflicts over intellectual property."

The editor of VnS News explains the structure of V&S Cable thus "there is a cable organization of the four districts of the operators. V&S is an MSO. There are other MSO's functioning in all the major towns. Sevaral MSO's got together and formed a super MSO called the V&S Cable private limited in 2008, a private company with about 150 shareholders. Mainly the shareholders are the MSO's of the three districts of Sivsagar, Tinsukia and Dibrugarh." It explains the whole story of consolidation, in most parts of India there is a fierce competition in the cable network sector. In some states the dominance of a single MSO is seen where all the other players have either sold off to the larger MSO or simply had to close operations due to competition. 'It has been observed that the level of competition in the MSOs' business is not uniform throughout the country; certain States (e.g. Delhi, Karnataka, Rajasthan, West Bengal and Maharashtra) have a large number of MSOs providing their services' (TRAI, 2013: 07). Larger the size of the MSO more the benefit for the customer as the MSO can pass off the benefit of economies of scale to the consumer, but gives rise to unhealthy competitive practices too which have adverse effect on the customer. And abuse of market dominance by these MSO's is rampant across the country. Some of the larger MSO's in the country are owned by big corporate houses giving them huge advantages over small town LCO's, who are at their mercy some of them include Siti cable owned by Zee Media group and Rupert Murdoch's News Corp, Hathway cable owned by the Raheja group, the Hinduja brothers owned Incablenet, RPG group owned RPG Netcom, Sumangali Cable Vision owned by SUN group etc. These mammoth MSO's cover a large part of the country and therefore the consolidation process in states such as Assam became important for their survival.

Chandan Jyoti Kalita talks about the process of consolidation in light of digitization, "there is a order from TRAI that signals should be made digital from 2014. Now what has happened is that small operators in smaller towns like Titabor, Lekhapani which are small pockets cannot

afford the cost of putting up a digital console; it is a costly affair to transmit digital signal. For this reason V&S Cable tied up with Gujarat Telelink Private Limited (GTPL) in a 60:40 share agreement in January 2012, where GTPL holds the majority share. And now we are called GTPL V&S. So GTPL provides the technological support to us. It provides the set top boxes for digitization, the process is already underway. We already have around 500-600 set top boxes installed. So at present we have both analogue and digital signals transmitted at the same time. We have 100 channels being transmitted at present." V&S cable although being one of the largest MSO in the region had to go for funding from external sources. GTPL is a Gujarat based corporate house with MSO presence across the country particularly in states of Gujarat, West Bengal, Jharkhand, Bihar and now in Assam. GTPL itself is again 50% owned by Hathway Cable and Datacom, one of the largest MSO in India.

Thus small town LCO's spread over the region have no option other than to align with V&S Cable. Smaller LCO's simply do not have the might to compete in a capital intensive market. A report by TRAI on the monopoly of MSO's and cable operators in India s says:

> The size of markets catered to (across States, cities and even localities) by an MSO determines its market power and influence. One of the ways in which MSOs have tried to expand and increase their size (and influence) is by buying out LCOs and smaller MSOs. The joint venture/ subsidiary model has emerged as a result of mergers and acquisitions (M&A) of LCOs/MSOs by large MSOs. The MSOs have varying levels of ownership interest in these LCOs. Typically, MSOs provide more favorable terms and financial assistance to joint venture companies and subsidiaries. The point is that, by way of acquisition, joint venture or subsidiary, some MSOs have been increasing their presence and size leading to a situation of market dominance. There are instances where the dominant MSOs are misusing their market power to create barriers of entry for new players, providing unfair terms to other stakeholders in

the value chain and distorting the competition. MSOs with significant reach (i.e. a large network and customer base) are leveraging their scale of operations to bargain with broadcasters for content at a lower price and also demand higher carriage and placement fees. Such MSOs are in a position to exercise market power in negotiations with the LCOs on the one hand, and with the broadcasters on the other (TRAI, 2013: 8).

5.5.3 Legal Issues

The LCO's and MSO's come under the purview of the Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act, 1995. The Act has several loopholes and the MSO's and LCO's have been using them for their end. The existence of local channels itself has been questioned from time to time. The fact that they are not registered with the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting but take local clearance from the Post Offices makes them fall outside of the purview of rules for satellite channels. The rules are quite vague and have been interpreted locally by administrators. GTPL which has a large operation in Maharashtra runs four channels in Nagpur city including news channels. In an interview to 'Nagpur Today' Sameer Chaubey the CEO of GTPL says "we are running round the clock news channels as there are no such directives restricting us to do so. The current regulation suggests running round the clock through wireless medium like satellite's uplink and downlink. But at the same time, there is no restriction on wired medium showing news too as we do with fibre optics" (2013). Based on complaints the ministry has set up a committee to look into the issue of channels being run by LCO's and MSO's.

Chandan Jyoti Kalita talks about their brush with law "Dibru Live is a channel only telecasted in Dibrugarh. Earlier there were two channels UATV which was started in 2006 by all the cable operators put together and only telecasted in Dibrugarh. That was mainly a news based channel.

There were a lot of problems created by the Deputy Commissioner in Dibrugarh then, who raised objection of how cable television can transmit news. Then we renamed our programme as *Tathya Pravah* (flow of information). The news was sent out as information." This epitomizes how sensitive the legal grounds of LCC's are. But VnS News now has been running without any objections raised since its inception in 2009, and it no longer uses subversive methods anymore like *Tathya Pravah*.

"The Directorate of Information and Public Relation (DIPR) of the state regularly publish press releases through us. But they haven't interfered with us till date. After 2006 when there were a few questions raised after that nothing of that sort has happened. So there are messages from the Army like Operation *Sadbhavana* etc. press releases including other government agencies too. The satellite channels are not interested in those kinds of welfare messages. Our reporters are also called for press conferences with the same status of conventional reporters" these remarks by the editor tell a lot about the present state of legitimacy that is there, but which rests on very thin grounds of omission rather than clear directives in the government regulations.

5.5.4 Editorial Practices

The editorial structure of VnS channels is visibly better than BTN. Because VnS has a larger reach and has four channels it requires more people to man the channels. All four channels have a common Editor in Chief, Mr. Anjan Kalita who looks after all the channels and each channel in turn has an editor who is in charge of the day to day programming. The network is run by a director and at present Mr. Sanjoy Deb holds the responsibility. So, the hierarchy of the network and those of the channels are clearly demarcated in operations. But the legacy of the early days

clearly persists, creating problems for experienced journalists from the print media who have been inducted to upgrade these local bulletins into more professionalized news coverage (Naregal, 2010: 304). Chandan Jyoti Kalita, who is the editor of VnS talks about the news gathering process, "we have video editors, we have reporters. The reporters send the news to us, and then the video editors edit it. Then the editor in chief checks the script on a daily basis and then it is made into a package after voice over by the anchors and new readers. All the decisions about the news are taken by the editor in chief solely. The same news generally runs for the whole day repeatedly. The evening 7 pm prime time starts with Assamese news of one hour followed by the 8 pm Bengali news and then 9 pm news in Hindi. This package of one hour is repeated the whole day."

The people associated with the process of news are mainly local reporters of other media houses. Otherwise a pure distribution company like V&S Cable has no grounding in producing programmes and that too news. People from the journalist community are hired to give that element of legitimacy to the content generated. It is interesting to note, at a time when satellite television channels based in Guwahati are limiting their programming to single languages, it is LCC's which drive content generation in multiple languages. The experience of making content at the grassroots is that these operators know their audiences well, in most cases the programmes are produced at the advice of the neighbourhood audience. And thus the programmes produced are popular and made with the confidence of the audience. They drive growth both for the channel and the network too. As Neyazi points 'localization of consumption involves taking news to the grassroots by including local happenings, such as crimes, marriages and inauguration ceremonies, obituaries, etc. (2010: 917).

Again, *Aamar* VnS one of the entertainment 24x7 channel is an Assamese language channel which focuses on interactivity. "We have

programmes like *Baate Ghate*, asking people questions on the road, then *Silpir Prithivi*, where singers and artists are called in the studio for interview and entertainment. We have programmes where old song requests are played out. The requests are done over the telephone, which is a live programme" says Kalita. I observed that one feature of the four channels was the continuous display of names of people whose requests are being played out. There is a deliberate attempt to make the viewers feel connected to the channels. They act like people's channels. VnS also boasts of two in house studios to record the programmes. One studio is used specifically for news production while the other is for all kinds of shows including talk shows.

The reporters in VnS are salaried people. The reporters are paid by the respective LCO's. For each market it is the operator who engages the reporter. So VnS does not bear any expense. The advantage as the reach of VnS grows and more the number of LCO's so too the number of reporters and the area of coverage goes up. Each LCO thus takes equal responsibility and interest in coverage of news as their popularity depends on the transmission of their area news. It acts like a co-operative in its operation where news gathering to transmission process is all tied in an equation of shared responsibility for shared benefits. It's a give and take policy where the LCO's know their futures are tied to the well being of the smooth running of the LCC's.

5.5.5 Growing Popularity

Chandan Jyoti Kalita claims "even outside Dibrugarh VnS is very popular. In small towns like Sonari, Nazira, towns of Jorhat, in Demow etc. without VnS people cannot imagine cable service. People wait for VnS programmes. We also telecast deferred live programmes of *Bihu* etc.

and other important occasions for the people." It is the smaller towns and villages where the cable networks focus more. The urban centers are already saturated and with DTH trying to penetrate rural areas where cable networks do not reach, have made them to do programmes keeping in mind these audiences.

VnS has tied up with Guwahati based *Prag* cable network by which VnS programmes are sent to Guwahati for telecast. At present VnS news is the only channel to be telecasted in Guwahati. So each home that *Prag* network goes VnS is present too. The owner of *Prag* Cable network is also a shareholder of VnS and thus it fits into their scheme of things. VnS News of upper Assam thus reaches Guwahati through a complex chain of shareholding, merger and acquisition process, a common phenomenon in the survival process of the cable networks of the country.

Thus in this chapter, I have analyzed the status of the local channels in the media scene in Assam. The questions of legality notwithstanding these channels are important cogs in the local media economy. Increasing competition in the satellite channel space and too much dependence on a single center of growth has muffled people's voice in media in Assam. What these local channels do is therefore add to the local sphere, giving voice to the voiceless, where opinions of the local citizens matter more than anything. The economic structures of such networks make it necessary to go to the masses for their legitimacy and in turn existence and revenues.

Chapter six

Conclusion

6.1 Interpretation

I have presented my case of the existence of a local media in Assam that is independent of the mainstream media discourse. The previous five chapters have been an attempt to understand this development in a systematic and theoretically grounded manner. The arguments for the theses have been backed up by my field work with local cable networks and media professionals as well. My objectives in this study were mainly to see the growth of local media not as a parallel to mainstream media, rather more as an offspring of the shortcomings of the mainstream media.

For the purpose of my study I had to rely on secondary data to connect the present growth in media in Assam to its historicity. I find that print in Assam was brought by the missionaries as part of a larger colonial exercise of the British. The administrative interest and expansion scheme of things were the main reasons for the introduction of letters in this part of the world. The Mission press set up at Sivasagar was a step in that direction, and as part of that plan the set up of '*Orunodoi*' in 1846, the first journal, which gave the people of Assam the first taste of a uniform language for all. Modern education followed to this part of the world with printed books made available more easily along with the Bible. The era of the introduction of print served another purpose, the establishment of Assamese as a distinct language separate from Bengali. And the press at Sivasagar played an important role in defining the acceptance of the dialect adjoining to Sivasagar as the standard language. The first Assamese grammar book was printed from here in 1848. The first strands

of nationalism thus rode on the back of the press in Assam. Modernity as postulated by the west is symbiotic with 'print-capitalism', the idea forwarded by Anderson (1980) which according to him was the base of the formation of a community.

Thus, early press in Assam was a counter discourse to the dominance of Bengali as a medium of instruction and official language in administration and not necessarily the context that the missionaries started the press in the first place. Press was appropriated by the nationalists during this phase of history; we see the beginning of other journals in Guwahati, Calcutta where the intellectual class went for higher education, and even one in Majuli, where *'Asam Bilasini'* was started by a Hindu religious institution. The role of the early press remained nationalistic in its outlook for a large part of its existence. The independence movement too saw an active participation, albeit the number of dailies in Assam was miniscule.

The next major event that I find important for the press in Assam is the Assam Agitation during 1979-85. As I have pointed out in chapter three, it saw the rise of a movement against illegal migrants, which was marked by active participation of the students' body All Assam Students Union (AASU) and other nationalist organizations. Today, it is clear from facts that the Assam Agitation was a movement whose agenda was set by an over eager press, which saw active participation from journalist and editors of major news dailies. It is clear from the events that press in Assam for a large part remained a tool for nationalistic appropriation. The power of the press was proved in the success of the agitation, which led to the realization that press ownership was indeed important in the political realm. Post-agitation there was an increase in the activity of the press, and Assam saw an emerging boom in the decade of the 1990's.

As I have mentioned in chapter four, the decade of 1990's was also that of economic liberalization brought about by the Congress government at the center. This period was marked by the entry of foreign satellite channels into the country. Television which was the monopoly of the state broadcaster DD all along was breached. Cable networks started to spring up everywhere. This was a phase of consolidation in the Indian media industry. Indian companies in the later part of the decade also started to open television companies. And daily newspapers opened local editions in an effort to consolidate. Regional media witnessed a boom, in states such as Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Kerala, etc. we see the growth of a strong and vibrant news media.

The explosion of media during this phase in Assam therefore cannot be seen in isolation. Assam was already endowed with a press whose influence on the masses was proven. Media organizations started to grow from everywhere, whose owners ranged from politicians, businessman, contractors, etc. There grew an intrinsic relation between power and media. As I had quoted Boyce (1987) in chapter two, "as such the relationship could be said to have been symbiotic, with political class also depending on the press to disseminate their agenda, the real power rested with the constitutionally elected leaders (pg. 109). Press in Assam was distinctly under the influence of power, apart from the 'Assam Tribune' and 'Janasadharan' group none of the others are in the business of media. Most of them have sprouted in the last decade with the idea that media can be a useful tool in the exercise of power. Thus the discourse of power and media in Assam is an ongoing process.

In 2004, satellite television was launched, and within a few years we have seen a spurt in their numbers. The dynamics of the media sector changed very fast. We had already seen the newspapers trying to consolidate by opening local editions in important towns such as Jorhat, Dibrugarh, Lakhimpur etc. But these local editions failed to serve their

real purpose, as they were confined to being just reprints, and hardly contributed to the local sphere. The pages were made and designed in Guwahati based offices which were sent to the local offices to be printed. The only purpose these offices consequently served was of reducing the time lag; newspapers now reached the districts in the morning itself.

The onslaught of television looked like doing what the print failed to do i.e. reach the grassroots. North East TV started with the ambitious plan of reaching the whole of North East, by producing programme in every language possible. The late entrants did not make this mistake; rather they focused on Assam itself. As Murdock (1982) suggested people who were successful in other sectors of the economy thought they had the legitimacy to start new media. And even the advent of the new technologies could not release media from the clutches of the few capitalists. The dependence of the television on advertising revenue made news irrational and palliative. It was all a process of maintaining the social order and undisturbing the nature of the institutions that are in place (Murdock and Golding, 1977). And thus the relation between media ownership and media performance is a reality. The content of media therefore depends on the negotiation of power and money and the extent that advertisers have access to these means of propaganda.

In the case of satellite television in Assam, advertising revenue dictated a lot of the decisions, and even their existence. The introduction of TRP's emphasized on the importance to grab viewers' attention with programmes that border on entertainment and information. There was another flaw; the local did not matter in their scheme of things. All the advertisers were based in Guwahati, channels were based in Guwahati, and TRP's were calculated based on Guwahati. Thus Guwahati, apart from being the power center became the center of all that is broadcasted. As a result the 'local' as a space blanked out of view. What is happening

in the interiors of the state is nobody' concern as long as they don't bring in the revenue.

As theorists have argued for the perfect model that serves the interests of the people, different theories based on commercial interests, guardianship model etc, have been found to be wanting. The era of public service broadcasting based on a guardianship model, which thinks its role to inform and educate the masses, is over. While third world countries have toyed with the idea of development communication (Melkote, 1991) model as best suited for its purpose and remains an important paradigm in achieving the development goals of society. But one of the most important role of media has been to give space to what people believe should be the function of the media. The Public Sphere (Habermas, 1986) model gives ample space to media to do just that. A sense of community ownership, participatory culture characterizes the idea of a public sphere model, although it does not necessarily mean that media is owned by the community, it helps in fostering that feeling.

The phenomenon of LCC's should be seen in this context, which I have argued for in chapter five. LCC's are basically channels that co-exist with any cable network. The two LCC's that I studied resemble a unique form of 'small media', which although is owned by operators, is actually sustained by the interests of the consumers. This consumer-audience equation has led to programming which is interactive. The 'local' which has lost out in the mainstream media gains importance here, infact the local becomes the site for production of 'culture'. Be it school programmes, a local match, neighbourhood programmes, inaugurations, local festivals etc. are at the center of LCC's programming. The government always eyes independent spaces with concern and the existence of LCC's is in a legal tangle, it is ambiguities in the Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act 1995 that allows the operations of these channels. Yet, they become important means of public information

used by the administration from time to time, and can be found in most towns in Assam. The reach of the LCC's have increased with consolidation in the industry, and as seen in the case of VnS reaches four districts and Guwahati too through a complex chain of shareholding and agreements.

The survival of these channels does not just depend on advertisements, rather in its ability to attract participation from its audience. Advertisements for most parts remain local as well and the advertiser knows the audience that the message reaches to. And this knowledge of the audience has made programming focused, and multi-lingual. At a time when most of the satellite channels are resorting to cutting down in the number of languages, VnS has specific channels for Assamese, Hindi and Bengali audience. In case of BTN we see that it has leveraged its news collection mechanism to open a print daily, media whether it's print or electronic does not make any difference to them so long the end remains same. The goodwill of the LCC also benefits the daily and vice versa.

The salient features of the study in a nutshell:

1. Press in Assam is an outcome of the nationalist pursuits in nineteenth century Assam

2. The Assam Agitation, in substantial parts, was a result of the agenda set by the press with its nationalist leanings

3. Local editions of dailies only reduced the 'delayed news syndrome', rather than localizing content

4. Press in Assam is used as a tool for political influence

5. Boom in media saw the influx of dubious capital, an easy way to increase and maintain the status quo

6. Unstable existence of media entities is due to complex nature of ownership, and uncertain capital

7. Television ratings dictate the content of televisions, while print content is dictated by its fear of losing out to television

8. The growth of local content through LCCs has facilitated an emergent layer of the press and media at the grass root level.

9. The existence of LCCs is explained by the global/local dichotomy of the Guwahati media and LCO's

10. LCCs act as local sites of resistance and space for production of local values and codes

6.2 Implication of the Study

I have tried to present the existence of both the Commercial model and the Public Sphere model of media concurrently in Assam. Although it cannot be proved that the failure of one has led to the rise of the other due to the difference in market that they cater and the technology that they use to reach their audience. There is a complex intertwined nature of the presence of characteristics of both the model at the same time. The LCC's are commercial and as yet act as a local public sphere. The pattern of audience and their intrinsic connection with the networks provide for a wired 'local space', the very wires that carry 'globalized' programmes of satellite channels to the homes of the audience in Assam.

My thesis is an attempt at understanding the very course that press has taken in the course of its 150 year old history. At a general level, this study tries to put in theoretical perspectives the nature and functioning of the press that are at work in complex media environment in Assam. The impact of globalization on regional media has made it to act more and more in consonance with global ideas of media. When regional media saw a boom in the 1990's and early 2000 it was attributed to localization of content. Regional media started off with being champions of local space, but the pressures of the market economy has led to a change in their policies. Media which is dependent on revenues for survival cannot invest in areas where there are no revenues. The existence of the 'local', in globalization parlance, to be in direct contrast to the global space made it unattractive. Globalization harped on homogeneity, while 'local' meant giving recognition to heterogeneity. The increasingly hybrid concepts of 'glocal' and 'glocalization' are forwarded as new models of acceptance of the 'local', while in reality they hide the 'local' under the garb of commercialization.

The growth of media is an ongoing process, and for a state like Assam it is at its infancy. My study may thus be regarded as an attempt at understanding the tangential direction of this evolution, the various strands of media systems that exist and the perceptible location of the audience. Due to lack of time and resources I had to limit the number of case studies. Future studies surely can throw light on the sustainability and pertinence of these networks in the long run vis-à-vis the existing media.

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Appendix 1: LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

Name	Designation	Organization
Arijit Aditya	Editor	*Dainik Jugasankha*
Pranab Bora	Resident Editor	The Telegraph
Dinkar Kumar	Editor	*The Sentinel* (Hindi)
Paragmoni Aditya	Political Editor	News Live
Prasanta Rajguru	Executive Editor	*Aamar Asom*
Bashishtha Pandey	Editor	*Purvanchal Prahari*
Santanu Bhuyan*	News Editor	Prime News
Pratap Bordoloi**	Editor	News Time Assam
Radhika Mohan Bhagwati	Editor	*Dainik Asom*
Samudra Gupta Kashyap	Senior Correspondent	The Indian Express
Haider Hussain	Editor	*Asomiya Pratidin*
Sudip Prakash Baruah	News Editor	Prag News
Manjit Mahanta***	Editor in Chief	Prime News
Pranjal Phukon	Correspondent	The Statesman
P. G. Baruah	Editor	The Assam Tribune
Monish Das	Director	BTN Cable
Chandan Jyoti Kalita	Editor	VnS News

* Santanu Bhuyan is no longer with Prime News as the channel had shut down during the course of this research.
** Pratap Bordoloi is no longer with News Time Assam, the channel was bought by Pratidin group and has hired a new editor.
***Manjit Mahanta left Prime News and joined NE TV on March 1, 2013.

Appendix 2:

THE CABLE TELEVISION NETWORKS
(REGULATION) ACT, 1995

CHAPTER I
PRELIMINARY

CHAPTER II
REGULATION OF CABLE TELEVISION NETWORK

CHAPTER III
SEIZURE AND CONFISCATION OF CERTAIN EQUIPMENT

CHAPTER IV
OFFENCES AND PENALTIES

CHAPTER V

MISCELLANEOUS

THE CABLE TELEVISION NETWORKS
(REGULATION) ACT, 1995[39]

AN
ACT

to regulate the operation of cable television networks in the country and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.

BE it enacted by Parliament in the Forty-sixth Year of the Republic of India as follows.

CHAPTER I

PRELIMINARY

1. Short title, extent and commencement.—*(1)* This Act may be called the Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act, 1995.

(2) It extends to the whole of India.

(3) It shall be deemed to have come into force on the 29th day of September, 1994.

2. Definitions.—In this Act, unless the context otherwise requires,—

[40][(a) 'authorised officer' means, within his local limits of jurisdiction;-

    (i)   a District Magistrate, or

    (ii)   a Sub-divisional Magistrate, or

    (iii)   a Commissioner of Police,

    and includes any other officer notified in the Official Gazette, by the Central Government or the State Government, to be an authorised officer for such local limits of jurisdiction as may be determined by that Government;]

[41][(aa)] 'cable operator' means any person who provides cable service through a cable television network or otherwise controls or is responsible for the management and operation of a cable television network;

  (b)   'cable service' means the transmission by cables of programmes including re-transmission by cables of any broadcast television signals;

  (c)   'cable television network' means any system consisting of a set of closed transmission paths and associated signal generation, control and distribution equipment, designed to provide cable service for reception by multiple subscribers;

  (d)   'company' means a company as defined in section 3 of the Companies Act, 1956; (1 of 1956).

  (e)   'person' means—

    (i)   an individual who is a citizen of India;

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[39]   Act No. 7 of 1995. Act as enactment date on 25 March 1995. Published in Gazette of India Extraordinary Part II Section I, dated 25 March 1995.

[40]   Inserted by the Cable Tekevision Networks (Regulation) Amendment Act, 2000, with effect from 1.9.2000.

[41]   Clause (a) relettered as clause (aa) by Act 36 of 2000 with effect from 1.9.2000.

(ii) an association of individuals or body of individuals, whether incorporated or not, whose members are citizens of India;

(iii) a company in which not less than fifty-one per cent of the paid-up share capital is held by the citizens of India;

(f) 'prescribed' means prescribed by rules made under this Act;

(g) 'programme' means any television broadcast and includes—

(i) exhibition of films, features, dramas, advertisements and serials through video cassette recorders or video cassette players;

(ii) any audio or visual or audio-visual live performance or presentation, and the expression 'programming service' shall be construed accordingly;

(h) 'registering authority' means such authority as the Central Government may, by notification in the Official Gazette, specify to perform the functions of the registering authority under this Act;

(i) 'subscriber' means a person who receives the signals of cable television network at a place indicated by him to the cable operator, without further transmitting it to any other person.

CHAPTER II

REGULATION OF CABLE TELEVISION NETWORK

3. Cable television network not to be operated except after registration.—No person shall operate a cable television network unless he is registered as a cable operator under this Act:

Provided that a person operating a cable television network, immediately before the commencement of this Act, may continue to do so for a period of ninety days from such commencement; and if he has made an application for registration as a cable operator under section 4 within the said period, till he is registered under that section or the registering authority refuses to grant registration to him under that section.

4. Registration as cable operator.—(1) Any person who is operating or is desirous of operating a cable television network may apply for registration as a cable operator to the registering authority.

(2) An application under sub-section (1) shall be made in such form and be accompanied by such fee as may be prescribed.

(3) On receipt of the application, the registering authority shall satisfy itself that the applicant has furnished all the required information and on being so satisfied, register the applicant as a cable operator and grant to him a certificate of such registration:

Provided that the registering authority may, for reasons to be recorded in writing and communicated to the applicant, refuse to grant registration to him if it is satisfied that he does not fulfil the conditions specified in clause (e) of section 2.

[42]['4A. **Transmission of programmes through addressable system, etc.**—(1) Where the Central Government is satisfied that it is necessary in the public interest to do so, it may, by notification in the Official Gazette, make it obligatory for every cable operator to transmit or retransmit programme of any pay channel through an addressable system with effect from such date as may be specified in the notification and different dates may be specified for different States, cities, towns or areas, as the case may be.

(2) If the Central Government is satisfied that it is necessary in the public interest so to do, it may, by notification in the Official Gazette, specify one or more free-to-air channels to be included in the package of channels forming basic service tier and any or more such channels may be specified, in the notification, *genre-wise* for providing a programme mix of entertainment, information, education and such other programmes.

(3) The Central Government may specify in the notification referred to in sub-section (2), the number of free-to-air channels to be included in the package of channels forming basic service tier for the purposes of that sub-section and different numbers may be specified for different States, cities, towns or areas, as the case may be.

(4) If the Central Government is satisfied that it is necessary in the public interest so to do, it may, by notification in the Official Gazette, specify the maximum amount which a cable operator may demand from the subscriber for receiving the programmes transmitted in the basic service tier provided by such cable operator.

(5) Notwithstanding anything contained in sub-section (4), the Central Government may, for the purposes of that sub-section, specify in the notification referred to in that sub-section different maximum amounts for different States, cities, towns or areas, as the case may be.

(6) Notwithstanding anything contained in this section, programmes of basic service tier shall be receivable by any subscriber on the receiver set of a type existing immediately before the commencement of the Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Amendment Act, 2002 without any addressable system attached with such receiver set in any manner.

(7) Every cable operator shall publicise, in the prescribed manner, to the subscribers the subscription rates and the periodic intervals at which such subscriptions are payable for receiving each pay channel provided by such cable operator.

(8) The cable operator shall not require any subscriber to have a receiver set of a particular type to receive signals of cable television network:

Provided that the subscriber shall use an addressable system to be attached to his receiver set for receiving programmes transmitted on pay channel.

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[42] Inserted by Act No. 2 of 2003, section 2 with effect from 31.12.2002.

(9) Every cable operator shall submit a report to the Central Government in the prescribed form and manner containing the information regarding—

    (i) the number of total subscribers;

    (ii) subscription rates;

    (iii) number of subscribers receiving programmes transmitted in basic service tier or particular programme or set of programmes transmitted on pay channel;

in respect of cable services provided by such cable operator through a cable television network, and such report shall be submitted periodically at such intervals as may be prescribed and shall also contain the rate of amount, if any, payable by the cable operator to any broadcaster.

Explanation.—For the purposes of this section,—

    (a) 'addressable system' means an electronic device or more than one electronic devices put in an integrated system through which signals of cable television network can be sent in encrypted or unencrypted form, which can be decoded by the device or devices at the premises of the subscriber within the limits of authorisation made, on the choice and request of such subscriber, by the cable operator to the subscriber;

    (b) 'basic service tier' means a package of free-to-air channels provided by a cable operator, for a single price to the subscribers of the area in which his cable television network is providing service and such channels are receivable for viewing by the subscribers on the receiver set of a type existing immediately before the commencement of the Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Amendment Act, 2002 without any addressable system attached to such receiver set in any manner;

    (c) 'channel' means a set of frequencies used for transmission of a programme;

    (d) 'encrypted', in respect of a signal of cable television network, means the changing of such signal in a systematic way so that the signal would be unintelligible without a suitable receiving equipment and the expression 'unencrypted' shall be construed accordingly;

    (e) 'free-to-air channel', in respect of a cable television network, means a channel, the reception of which would not require the use of any addressable system to be attached with the receiver set of a subscriber;

    (f) 'pay channel', in respect of a cable television network, means a channel the reception of which by the subscriber would require the use of an addressable system to be attached to his receiver set.']

5. Programme code.—No person shall transmit or re-transmit through a cable service any programme unless such programme is in conformity with the prescribed programme code:

⁴³[* * * *]

6. Advertisement code.—No person shall transmit or re-transmit through a cable service any advertisement unless such advertisement is in conformity with the prescribed advertisement code:

⁴⁴[* * * *]

7. Maintenance of register.—Every cable operator shall maintain a register in the prescribed form indicating therein in brief the programmes transmitted or re-transmitted through the cable service during a month and such register shall be maintained by the cable operator for a period of one year after the actual transmission or re-transmission of the said programmes.

⁴⁵ **[8. Compulsory transmission of Doordarshan channels**—(1) Every cable operator shall, from the commencement of the Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Amendment Act, 2000, re-transmit at least two Doordarshan terrestrial channels and one regional language channel of a State in the prime band, in satellite mode on frequencies other than those carrying terrestrial frequencies.

(2) The Doordarshan channels referred to in sub-section (1) shall be re-transmitted without any deletion or alteration of any programme transmitted on such channels.]

9. Use of standard equipment in cable television network.—No cable operator shall, on and from the date of the expiry of a period of three years from the date of the establishment and publication of the Indian Standard by the Bureau of Indian Standards in accordance with the provisions of the Bureau of Indian Standards Act, 1986, use any equipment in his cable television network unless such equipment conforms to the said Indian standard:

⁴⁶[*Provided* that the equipment required for the purposes of section 4A shall be installed by cable operator in his cable television network within six months from the date, specified in the notification issued under

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⁴³ Proviso omitted by the Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Amendment Act, 2000, with effect from 1 9 2000 Prior to its omission, proviso read as under
  'Provided that nothing in this section shall apply to the programmes of foreign satellite channels which can be received without the use of any specialised gadgets or decoder '

⁴⁴ Proviso omitted by the Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Amendment Act, 2000, with effect from 1 9 2000 Prior to its omission, proviso read as under
  Provided that nothing in this section shall apply to the programmes of foreign satellite channels which can be received without the use of any specialised gadgets or decoder

⁴⁵ Substituted by the Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Amendment Act, 2000, with effect from 1 9 2000 Prior to its substitution read as under
  '8 *Compulsory transmission of two Doordarshan channels* —(1) Every cable operator using a dish antenna or Television Receive only shall, from the commencement of this Act, re-transmit at least two Doordarshan channels of his choice through the cable service
  (2) The Doordarshan channels referred to in sub-section (1) shall be re-transmitted without any deletion or alteration of any programme transmitted on such channel '

⁴⁶ Inserted by the Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Amendment Act, 2002, with effect from 31 12 2002

sub-section (*1*) of that section, in accordance with the provisions of the said Act for said purposes.]

10. Cable television network not to interfere with any telecommunication system.—Every cable operator shall ensure that the cable television network being operated by him does not interfere, in any way, with the functioning of the authorised telecommunication systems.

. CHAPTER III

SEIZURE AND CONFISCATION OF CERTAIN EQUIPMENT

11. Power to seize equipment used for operating the cable television network.— [47][(1) If any authorized officer has reason to believe that the provisions of section 3, [48] [4A], 5, 6 or 8 have been or are being contravened by any cable operator, he may seize the equipment being used by such cable operator for operating the cable television network.]

(2) No such equipment shall be retained by the authorised officer for a period exceeding ten days from the date of its seizure unless the approval of the District Judge, within the local limits of whose jurisdiction such seizure has been made, has been obtained for such retention.

12. Confiscation.—The equipment seized under sub-section (1) of section 11 shall be liable to confiscation unless the cable operator from whom the equipment has been seized registers himself as a cable operator under section 4 within a period of thirty days from the date of seizure of the said equipment.

13. Seizure or confiscation of equipment not to interfere with other punishment.—No seizure or confiscation of equipment referred to in section 11 or section 12 shall prevent the infliction of any punishment to which the person affected thereby is liable under the provisions of this Act.

14. Giving of opportunity to the cable operator of seized equipment.—(1) No order adjudicating confiscation of the equipment referred to in section 12 shall be made unless the cable operator has been given a notice in writing informing him of the grounds on which it is proposed to confiscate such equipment and giving him a reasonable opportunity of making a representation in writing, within such reasonable time as may be specified in the notice against the confiscation and if he so desires of being heard in the matter:

Provided that where no such notice is given within a period of ten days from the date of the seizure of the equipment, such equipment shall be

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[47] ASubstituted by the Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Amendment Act, 2000 with effect from 1 9 2000 Prior to its substitution, sub-section (1) read as under

'(1) If any officer, not below the rank of a Group `A' officer of the Central Government authorised in this behalf by the Government (hereinafter referred to as the authorised officer), has reason to believe that the provisions of section 3 have been or are being contravened by any cable operator, he may seize the equipment being used by such cable operator for operating the cable television network '

[48] Inserted by the Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Amendment Act, 2002, with effect from 31 12 2002

returned after the expiry of that period to the cable operator from whose possession it was seized.

(2) Save as otherwise provided in sub-section (1), the provisions of the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908 (5 of 1908) shall, so far as may be, apply to every proceeding referred to in sub-section (1).

15. Appeal.—(1) Any person aggrieved by any decision of the court adjudicating a confiscation of the equipment may prefer an appeal to the court to which an appeal lies from the decision of such court.

(2) The appellate court may, after giving the appellant an opportunity of being heard, pass such order as it thinks fit confirming, modifying or revising the decision appealed against or may send back the case with such directions as it may think fit for a fresh decision or adjudication, as the case may be, after taking additional evidence if necessary.

(3) No further appeal shall lie against the order of the court made under sub-section (2).

CHAPTER IV
OFFENCES AND PENALTIES

16. Punishment for contravention of provisions of this Act.—[49][1] Whoever contravenes any of the provisions of this Act shall be punishable,—

    (a) for the first offence, with imprisonment for a term which may extend to two years or with fine which may extend to one thousand rupees or with both;

    (b) for every subsequent offence, with imprisonment for a term which may extend to five years and with fine which may extend to five thousand rupees.

[50][(2) Notwithstanding anything contained in the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 (2 of 1974), the contravention of section 4A shall be a cognizable offence under this section.]

17. Offences by companies.—(1) Where an offence under this Act has been committed by a company, every person who, at the time the offence was committed, was in charge of, and was responsible to, the company for the conduct of the business of the company, as well as the company, shall be deemed to be guilty of the offence and shall be liable to be proceeded against and punished accordingly:

Provided that nothing contained in this sub-section shall render any such person liable to any punishment, if he proves that the offence was committed without his knowledge or that he had exercised all due diligence to prevent the commission of such offence.

(2) Notwithstanding anything contained in sub-section (1), where any offence under this Act has been committed by a company and it is proved that the offence has been committed with the consent or connivance of, or

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[49] Section 16 renumbered as sub-section (1) by the Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Amendment Act, 2002

[50] Inserted by Act of 2003, section 5, with effect from 31 12 2002

is attributable to any negligence on the part of, any director, manager, secretary or other officer of the company, such director, manager, secretary or other officer shall also be deemed to be guilty of that offence and shall be liable to be proceeded against and punished accordingly.

Explanation.—For the purposes of this section,—

(a) 'Company' means any body corporate and includes a firm or other association of individuals; and

(b) 'director' in relation to a firm means a partner in the firm.

18. Cognizance of offences.—No court shall take cognizance of any offence punishable under this Act except upon a complaint in writing made [51][by any authorized officer.].

CHAPTER V

MISCELLANEOUS

19. Power to prohibit transmission of certain programmes in public interest.—Where [52] [any authorized officer] , thinks it necessary or expedient so to do in the public interest, he may, by order, prohibit any cable operator from transmitting or re-transmitting [53][any programme or channel if, it is not in conformity with the prescribed programme code referred to in section 5and advertisement code referred to in section 6 or if it is] likely to promote, on grounds of religion, race, language, caste or community or any other ground whatsoever, disharmony or feelings of enmity, hatred or ill-will between different religious, racial, linguistic or regional groups or castes or communities or which is likely to disturb the public tranquillity.

20. Power to prohibit operation of cable television network in public interest.— [54][1] Where the Central Government thinks it necessary or expedient so to do in public interest, it may prohibit the operation of any cable television network in such areas as it may, by notification in the Official Gazette, specify in this behalf.

21. Application of other laws not barred.—The provisions of this Act shall be in addition to, and not in derogation of, the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940, (23 of 1940.) the Pharmacy Act, 1948, (8 of 1948.) the Emblems and Names (Prevention of Improper Use) Act, 1950,(12 of 1950.) the Drugs (Control) Act, 1950,(12 of 1950.) the Cinematograph Act, 1952,(37 of 1952.) the Drugs and Magic Remedies (Objectionable Advertisements) Act, 1954,(21 of 1954.) the Prevention of Food Adulteration Act, 1954, (37 of 1954.) the Prize Competitions Act, 1955,

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[51] Substituted for 'by such officer, not below the rank of a Group `A' officer of the Central Government, as the State Government may, by notification in the Official Gazette, specify in this behalf' by Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Amendment Act, 2000, with effect from 1 9 2000

[52] Substituted for 'an officer, not below the rank of a Group `A' officer of the Central Government authorised by the State Government in this behalf' by Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Amendment Act, 2000, with effect from 1 9 2000   '

[53] Substituted for 'any particular programme if it is' by Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Amendment Act, 2000, with effect from 1 9 2000   '

[54] Inserted by Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Amendment Act, 2000, with effect from 1 9 2000

(42 of 1955.) the Copyright Act, 1957, (14 of 1957) the Trade and Merchandise Marks Act, 1958, (43 of 1958) the Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986 (60 of 1986.) and the Consumer Protection Act, 1986. (68 of 1986).

22. Power to make rules.—(1) The Central Government may, by notification in the Official Gazette, make rules to carry out the provisions of this Act.

(2) In particular, and without prejudice to the generality of the foregoing power, such rules may provide for all or any of the following matters, namely,—

(a) the form of application and the fee payable under sub-section (2) of section 4;

[55] [(aa) the manner of publicising the subscription rates and the periodical intervals at which such subscriptions are payable under sub-section (7) of section 4A;

(aaa) the form and manner of submitting report under sub-section (9) of section 4A and the interval at which such report shall be submitted periodically under that sub-section;]

(b) the programme code under section 5;

(c) the advertisement code under section 6;

(d) the form of register to be maintained by a cable operator under section 7;

(e) any other matter which is required to be, or may be, prescribed.

(3) Every rule made under this Act shall be laid, as soon as may be after it is made, before each House of Parliament, while it is in session, for a total period of thirty days which may be comprised in one session or in two or more successive sessions, and if, before the expiry of the session immediately following the session or the successive sessions aforesaid, both Houses agree in making any modification in the rule or both Houses agree that the rule should not be made, the rule shall thereafter have effect only in such modified form or be of no effect, as the case may be; so, however, that any such modification or annulment shall be without prejudice to the validity of anything previously done under that rule.

23. Repeal and savings.—(1) The Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Ordinance, 1995 is hereby repealed.

(2) Notwithstanding such repeal, anything done or any action taken under the said Ordinance, shall be deemed to have been done or taken under the corresponding provision of this Act.

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[55] Inserted by Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Amendment Act, 2002, with effect from 31.12.2002.

Appendix 3:

Cover Page of '*Orunodoi*'

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