CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The adolescent years of the researcher’s life passed in Dhekiajuli a small town in Assam. Dhekiajuli is located around 125 kilometres from Guwahati and 35 kilometres from Tezpur in Sonitpur district (then in 1982-83 it was under the Darrang district). Residents got some three four newspapers in the town. The Assam Tribune in English published from Guwahati along with Dainik Asom, an Assamese Daily from the same house. Then there was Dainik Janambhumi published from Jorhat. Statesman reached in the evening which was published from Kolkata. And the most local, ours own newspaper was ‘Mahajati’, a weekly published from Tezpur. People of the town were so attached with Mahajati that their belief on the news grew through Mahajati. It carried news from the state little bit and covered entire Sonitpur district at large. It covered the pros and cons of the district and served the community of Sonitpur district. Another local newspaper was Agnigarh published from Tezpur. Both newspapers carried news from Sonitpur district and both had a very strong bonding with the readers.

This is somehow like a ritual in the society of the town, which a community newspaper can impact. The researcher has seen how a small newspaper like Mahajati and Agnigarh shaped the community and united it, can motivate the community towards the development. The community newspapers like Mahajati and Agnigarh etc. were so powerful that the local community members believes
only on these newspapers, though it did not had the reach to the national capital or in some cases to the state capital. But these newspapers played a very positive and strong role in the society of the locality.

The researcher has chosen the topic for the research “Community Journalism in Assam: A study of its role, scope and impact on the society” from the inspiration of the researcher’s early students life enjoying the community newspapers like Mahajati and Agnigarh.

In Assam, there are various languages spoken among the different communities. Mainly the Assamese is lingua franca for the state as this is state language, but Bengali and Hindi are also used widely as many peoples are from that linguistic community. Besides these Indo Aryan languages, there are various languages spoken in Assam under the Bodo Naga linguistic stock. Bodo Naga is a linguistic stock originated from Tibeto-Burman group under Sino-Tibetan family. So, almost eleven linguistic communities from the Bodo group are there in Assam. Within these group, major linguistic communities are Bodo, Rabha, Karbi, Mising, Deori, Tiwa etc. Also major stocks of people are the linguistic community of Tibetan languages including the Ahoms. But in the present days the Ahoms are loosing their original languages and they are now major speakers of Assamese language. Other linguistic communities are Garo and Dimasa. They have also presence in Brahmaputra and Barak valley respectively.

With these much of linguistic communities, it is difficult to determine a single language as always acceptable language. But as the Assamese is the state language
and also the dominant language in the Brahmaputra valley, so in this study we are mainly concentrated in the Assamese language newspapers.

Started with *Orunodoi* in 1846, Assamese newspapers are publishing in Assam from different places. Most of these newspapers are published from Sivasagar, Dibrugarh, Jorhat, Tezpur and Guwahati. Both Assamese and English newspapers are publishing since the first part of twentieth century. But daily newspapers were publishing from 1935 onwards with *Natun Asomiya*.

Presently, more than a dozen Assamese newspapers are publishing along with English, Hindi and Bengali newspapers. There are daily newspapers in Boro and Karbi languages published from the BTC area and Karbi Anglong District respectively. Besides these, two metro newspapers are also having editions in Guwahati.

Except these two metro newspapers editions, all newspapers of Assam can be classified as community newspapers. Though some of the newspapers in Assam crossed the circulation of 50,000, but many are within the ambit of below 50,000 range serving only one community. Boro and Karbi newspapers are even of small circulated newspapers as there are very little literacy rate and total number of people is very limited in those linguistic communities.

1.1.2 Community newspapers:

If we want to trace out the history of community newspaper, then it can be back to 1690 with the publication of *Public Occurrence ; Both Foreign and Domestic* by Benjamin Harris in Boston. It was a monthly publication with three printed pages
and one blank page for private correspondence. In the introductory page about community journalism of National Newspaper Association of America cited that Unfortunately, the local authorities considered this publication "Without the least Privacy or Countenance of Authority" and containing "affections of a very high nature: As also sundry doubtful and uncertain Reports." As a result, an immediate ban on publication was issued and a second edition was never produced. It was not until 1704 that a second, more successful, newspaper appeared. (National Newspapers Association (NNA)

Since then, many newspapers were published which could be classified as community newspaper. Most of the early community newspapers were non-daily and served a small community. But it is seen that now many community newspapers are publishing as dailies. Presently, characteristics of a community newspaper are not only counted as their periodicity but its commitment to serve the community with information needs. These communities are of various types with its characteristics of geographic, political, social or religious. It is more of their sense of belongingness to a particular criterion.

With the changing technology, the community newspapers are also changing its facets. Some are weeklies or dailies and some may now be only present in the web. Many of the community newspaper, as we have found from our experience, have their presence in the web only as because in the cyber space, a little amount is needed for running a newspaper. So the earlier concept of community newspaper in a given geographical space is changing to the cyber space. Thus a community may now serve any member of the community without considering even its geographical area.
According to the Community Newspaper Readership Study conducted by The Reynolds Journalism Institute (RJI) on behalf of National Newspaper Association (NNA) in September and November 2013, about two third people of US reads the community newspapers. The research also found that it is most of the readers opted the community newspapers for its accuracy, local news and information and also for the entertainment. (National Newspapers Association (NNA). This what encourage us to study the community newspapers and community journalism as well in our place too.

1.1.3 Community Journalism:

There are three terms that are used, often interchangeably, to represent this new journalism concept: public journalism, civic journalism, and community journalism. All three terms have, as a common basis, the idea of the journalist as a member of the community gathering new stories for the civic good, for the public good and of course for the community.

A journalist’s focus is on the community and how as a journalist, reporter, broadcaster, they can best serve the people. This is best done when the journalist is a member of the community by being one of the citizens, not as an elitist member of the media or society.

These three terms represent the same idea--which collaboration between the citizens of the community and the media should all work together to solve problems or come up with ideas that might be solutions to problems that face the community and have a focus on self-improvement.
The term civic journalism began with American newspapers in the 1990s as they began to revisit the roots of the worthy profession. But today, journalists are involved in cases of civic journalism that include collaboration of the different community media - television, radio and the local newspaper. They work together to help the community deal with issues, or just bringing these issues to light, so that the people in the community can begin to discuss solutions and opportunities to make their lives and communities better.

In fact, civic journalism is happening around the world. Case studies have documented projects related to civic improvement and public deliberation (some with the participation of the media) in: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Columbia, Guatemala, Hungary, Lebanon, Poland, Romania, Russia, South Africa, Swaziland, and Tajikistan.

Civic journalism can be described using a simple three-phase process as written about by many of the authors in this movement in civic/community journalism. Those three phases include: consciousness raising, working through the issue with the community, and then a phase of issue resolution. While the resolution phase may sound like a final stage, it is just the beginning of actually solving problems and getting the community involved in solving their own problems or challenges.

In the consciousness-raising phase, the media finds out what issues are of concern in the community. To do that, the media must go out and become part of the community. The media reconnect themselves and talk to people, not just opinion leaders in the community. The media need to learn from the citizens. They need to learn: what the people think what is going on in their community; what would the
people like to know more about; and, how do the citizens think they can make a
difference and improve their lives. In the first phase, the journalist is on fact-
finding mission to learn about the community. In the process, news stories may be
written or produced about various aspects of the information uncovered. However,
during this phase, reporters are conducting research on their community for the
purpose of a much more long-range investigation.

In the second phase of “working through problems or issues,” the community has
now identified, for the journalist, the issues, an agenda or a public agenda, with the
emphasis on "public." The citizens have given their input to the media and
enlightened them on what they think is important in their community. From these
issues, the media can begin to construct news stories that highlight the peoples'
point of view of what's happening, or perhaps hold meetings to find out what the
community would like to know more about, how they would like to see issues
addressed, collect ideas, discuss ideas, bring government into the discussions, find
out a variety of ideas are and how they fit into the picture. This activity leads to the
third phase of civic and community journalism, resolution.

The plans and activities in phase two may lead to news coverage (print or
broadcast) like a series of articles in the newspaper, or a series of segments on a
broadcast news program, or a community project that addresses the original issue
to alleviate the problem. But, the civic and community journalist’s responsibility
does not stop there.

Because civic and community journalism is a process, the final phase, the
resolution phase, leads back to the beginning of the process. In the resolution
phase, news stories and projects may be completed. This may result in a resolution to the issue originally identified for the civic and community journalism project. But other issues may have come to the surface during the reporter's work with the community. It is at this time that these new issues are taken back to the first phase and worked through the process, again, with the community, in an attempt to solve these new issues.

Problems aren't always solved, and sometimes when they are solved, new problems come to light. So, the cycle continues. As the media becomes more aware of issues, they try to help people find solutions to the issues, and with the citizens, continue to focus on improvement and resolution of the issues. Because it's the people's solutions, not the media's solutions, the media simply continues to be that voice in the community, that forum in the community, where the public feel that they are the center, they are the most important part of the community.

As mentioned previously, this is the bridge between developmental communications and civic and community journalism. This is the return to what journalism was all about when journalists first started writing in newspapers--to keep their communities informed of issues affecting their survival. Early newspapers developed for local citizens to have a voice in public issues, for citizens to know what was going on in their community, and for citizens to know how to participate in their community. Civic journalism, public journalism, and community journalism is a movement with the people leading the media, telling the media what is important to them, and directing how the media can provide that forum for the citizens to engage in problem solving.
In the United States and other countries, civic journalism projects have addressed issues like elections, crime prevention, youth programs, AIDS, health care, and education. These topics are of universal importance and many of the international projects have focused on the same topics. While much of the published support materials in the field use American projects as examples, the tactics employed and the lessons learned will be able to be applied throughout the world.

Civic and community journalism is not a movement among scholars. It is not a movement among lecturers at polytechnics and universities; it is not teaching new journalists or new students how to serve people better. In fact, civic and community journalism is a movement of practicing journalists to do their job better and to make the impact of the media more meaningful. Civic journalism has its roots, its growth, in a non-American movement. Today, it is still not solely American. How do the journalists feel about this new way of approaching journalism? Arthur Charity notes in his book *A Positive Change for Reporters in the Performance of their Jobs* - they have reconnected with their local communities and improved their writing and focus skills as journalists (*Charity, 1995*).

Reporters from newspapers and broadcast organizations embrace the concepts of civic, public or community journalism and they talk about them at length in their publications. They provide insights about how the process has changed the way these reporters think about stories and the way that they collaborate on stories. Civic and community journalism has brought the reporters closer to the issues and to the people. Journalists feel like they're making a difference in the lives of their
public instead of just being an elitist organization. That is one of the most rewarding things for a reporter that comes out of this process.

1.1.4 Current Trend :

NWICO, the New World Information and Communications Order, the movement by UNESCO in the 1970's, can be seen as a foundation, a basis, for the current trend, the current emphasis, among journalists known as civic, public, or community journalism. As we have already mentioned that the goals of developmental communication fit nicely into the movement of community journalism or civic journalism.

To briefly define developmental communication, it was the belief that the instruments of media (Radio, Television, Newspapers) could be used by the central government of a country to help build a nation. The whole idea behind UNESCO and NWICO is that developing countries could build themselves up using the media. This was both a very important concept and a very misunderstood concept. That is, governments, not only the colonial governments but also the current governments of independent and developing countries, interpreted the UNESCO position to mean that they could take control of the media, and that they would use their government authority to tell the media what to do. The purpose was then to tell the media what was important to tell the people.

Illiteracy, health, poverty, education and even political awareness are all elements of nation building, of people building, and while developing countries' governments acknowledge that these things are important, it was probably their
control that caused the lack of media being supportive of initiatives in developmental communication. So, community journalism is sometimes interpreted as a return to the goals of developmental communication. It is an effort to, what has been called, "democratize the media."

1.1.5 Community Journalism in Assam:

In Assam, the concept of community journalism was started with the local newspapers published from various places in the early 20th century. After successful publications of the Orunodoi from Sibasagar, there were a few newspapers appeared from various parts of Assam. Orunodoi was a complete newspaper with various types of news, views, articles and illustration/pictures. It is in fact the first language newspaper in India to become a complete newspaper in journalistic sense. The other newspapers were mostly carried the character of the regional newspaper though these were not full-fledged newspapers. Assamese journalism started to fulfilled the journalistic criteria in the early part of the 20th century only with the publication Bahi by Padmanath Gohain Baruah. Bahi started various columns and news coverage as well as the various branches of knowledge in his newspaper.

The daily newspaper first appeared in Assam in 1935, and then The Assam Tribune in early part of 50s, which is now also in circulation. The first Assamese regular daily newspaper was Natun Asomiya. After that The Dainik Asom is serving the community. Likewise from the Barak valley, there were some popular newspapers like Sonar Cachar, Jugasankha etc. And now more than 20 daily newspapers are in circulation from Assam.
Besides all these newspapers, we have some local or community specific newspapers also in Assam. They are serving the community in true sense. Because, they are highlighting the local issues as well as the governmental schemes in simple words and community specific so that the community members can easily understand it.

These newspapers have a very strong voice in the local place or in the community. For example- *Mahajati* in Tezpur is serving for more than 40 years to the peoples of sonitpur district. Kalongpar in Nawgaon, Amar Nalbari in nalbari, Mangal Barta in Darrang, Gana Sabuk in Dhubri are some of the very strong media in their respective area or community. Besides these, there are some papers in Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Jorhat, Sibasagar, Marigaon, Karbi Anglong, Cachar, Kokrajhar, Goalpara and Kamrup.

In this study we will see the relevance of these newspapers and its functions in relation to the community journalism. How various newspapers of Assam whether it circulated in a district or in the whole state is practicing community journalism to cater the needs of the people. Till today no systematic study has been done for the community journalism in Assam. Keeping in the importance of the community journalism for the development as well as the community service, it is playing a very important role in the society. So, this study is trying to elucidate the role and impact of community journalism and also the future scope to improve and widen their role in the society.
1.2 : Aims and Objective of the study :

The main purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between the present newspapers and journalism in Assamese language with the concept of Community Journalism by analyzing the content of the Assamese language newspapers specially Dailies and weeklies. The aims of the study are to:

- Devise a content analysis framework containing dimensions of community information and community reporting and community involvement that examines the concept of Community Journalism, to investigate how Community Journalism is evident in the Assamese language newspapers.
- To investigate the perception of readers towards these Assamese language newspapers in further understanding the degree of doing community journalism by these newspapers.

The research have been designed to study from the basic concept of the community journalism to the community newspapers in Assam. The community journalism concept whether it is worth for the society like Assam or not. And this is also aims to review the community newspaper’s role and impact in the society.

Along with the community newspapers and the concept of community journalism, we have made an attempt to study the characteristics of the readers of the state in general and the Assamese community in particular.
The major objectives of this study are as follows:

i. to study the role and impact of the community journalism in Assam

ii. to study the scope of the community journalism in the developmental issues in Assam,

iii. to critically evaluate the role and impact of the community journalism in Assam vis-à-vis rest of the world,

iv. to study the new media as a possible mass media of community journalism in Assam.

1.3 Rational of the study:

The importance of this study is lying in its trend in world. As in many countries the community journalism is growing fast and mostly the developed countries, India is also have to follow this trend in recent future. Again, new goals for development in various societies are based mostly on the communication part, which is in other way dependent on the media. As the nature of big media house is not fit for the development communication for a specific society, the small media has to take command for this act. This small media is mostly practicing the community journalism and through this they are also doing the development communication. This is an important phenomenon for the community journalism in the present days. And for this may be the UN organizations are also giving more emphasis on the establishment and development of small or community media rather than big media concept for the development communication in the world.
In the case of Assam, most of newspapers are the community newspaper in their characteristics. Though some big newspapers are there in Assam currently, according to the classifications of big, medium and small newspapers criterion laid down by various organizations in India including RNI, but apart from the circulation figure, they carries the characteristics of community media.

Till now many scholars and journalists have been tracing out the history and growth of Assamese newspapers, but there is no systematic study have been carried out about their classification according to their nature of activities and presentation of news and information. The researcher as a teacher is teaching the media of Assam since last fifteen years, during this long teaching of the subject area, the researcher have noticed this phenomenon of community journalism in Assamese newspapers including big dailies (as listed by RNI in the report, Press in India, 2014).

In the light of the new trend of community journalism in the world, and its growing emphasis in the field of journalism and communication sector, the Assamese media can be studied from the point view of the community journalism and community media. This study will help in shaping the media’s role to the society further apart from what the media is playing. Also through this study trend of Assamese journalism in present time will be known to the academic world and accordingly this may help in planning for the media in this part of India for use of developmental activities and community services. Also through this study, the local media can get the analysis about their role and activity and accordingly they can streamline their goals and roles for the readers they are serving.
This study will be important for mapping the Assamese newspapers in the map of community journalism in the world. Since this is the first of its kind study, this will also paved the way for the scholars to analyzed these media from various angles in relation to contribution of the Assamese newspapers to the society, as community leader, as opinion leader, as community development communicator with reference to the particular media or press to get the degree of their community journalism activities. This will help in media planning for various purposes to the government and industry and organizations in future.

This is a baseline or a preliminary investigation of the topic which tries to get the degree of acceptability of these Assamese language newspapers as community newspaper. For that, the researcher used the content analysis as a major data collection tool along with the survey of some related people.

Though community newspaper category is not given in the Assamese newspaper industry as tag, but most of the newspapers or it can be said as almost all newspapers has a social contribution, which is in other way the community service, equal to community support. These newspapers, many of them are not declared themselves as community newspaper but they are working as social agent, and have the strong associations with the society.

In a research study conducted by Rosa Maria McManamey (2004) for PhD Thesis “The Relationship Between Community Newspapers and Social Capital: the Power to Empower” – the researcher raises some questions in support of the significance of that study – “How important is the role of social capital content in sustaining and developing the ‘success’ and longevity of the papers? …….. What happens
when a community paper draws a narrow base of community information? What are the particular factors that contribute to building communities through their community newspapers?”(McManamey, 2004). These queries are also relevant in this study. Though we do not generally get a thick line between commercial newspaper and community newspaper in Assamese language, like the other places of the western countries, but, by analyzing the content, we can get the idea about the newspaper, whether it be fallen under the category and characteristics of community newspaper or not.

1.4 Organization of Chapters:

Writing a dissertation is an art which also has a scientific method to follow. Covering the various aspects of the thesis, the researcher has organized it into few chapters. The first chapter is about the introduction of the topic, the present study. There is also a small background about the various concepts of community, community journalism, the place of research and the little about the community journalism in Assam. This chapter also includes the aims and objective of the study. One important sub heading of this chapter is rational of the study. This tries to describe the importance and reason for initiation of the study and the possible outcome of the study for the benefit of the academic as well as the community.

Chapter two is about the Research methodology and Review of the past literature. Here the researcher describes the universe of the study area. A brief description about the area and its significance is given under this sub heading. Following that, the researcher has given the hypothesis for this study in this chapter. Regarding samples and population for this study also given after the hypothesis. The
researcher has included detailed about the samples taken for this study in the subheading. Thereafter, the researcher included the tools for the data collection and also data analysis tools used in this study. The last part of this chapter is review of the past and related literature. The researcher has reviewed the literature available to him in relation to this topic area from both in international level and also the regional level resources. Some of the literature is in Assamese language and that too has been reviewed by the researcher for this study.

Chapter Three is about the concept and growth of community journalism. Here the researcher has tried to define the community, journalism and community journalism with its various forms in the world. To define community, the researcher has included the community of Assam and tries to give an overview of it in the light of the definitions given by various persons. This chapter also includes the brief about the society, and communication its relationship and impact. As the main focus of this study is on the community journalism, the research has given a wide description of concepts developed in various times by different schools or persons and also fitted it with the community journalism practices in Assam. Specially, Assamese community journalism and various newspapers doing community journalism in Assamese language are mentioned here for a clear concept about the topic area. The researcher included the various types and offshoots of community journalism in the world viz. public journalism, civic journalism, citizen journalism and participatory journalism as major offshoots of community journalism.

Chapter Four is about the background and growth of journalism with special reference to the community newspapers and community journalism. This chapter
incorporates a short history of journalism or press in Assam with particular reference to the Assamese journalism. This chapter contains some data facts on the recent RNI report on the press.

Chapter Five is about the role and impact of community journalism on the society. This chapter highlighted the different roles of journalism including agenda setting role and investigative and interpretative role of community journalism in the society with particular reference to the Assamese language newspapers. Also this chapter has given the barriers of community journalism in general and Assamese community journalism in particular. A few case studies are also incorporated in the chapter for better understanding.

Chapter Six is deals with data analysis. The data analysis is done for both qualitative and quantitative method for the contents of the selected Assamese daily newspapers. This is to see the relevance of community journalism in Assamese newspapers. Limited numbers of interview analysis for the community journalism and community newspapers in Assamese language also incorporated in this chapter. This chapter also highlighted the current trend of community journalism in Assamese.

Last chapter is about the summary and conclusion of this study. This chapter highlighted the summary of the entire study in relation to the main aims and objectives of the study. This chapter also has the small part containing the testing of hypothesis take for this study. There is a conclusion in the last of this chapter.
References:


Press in India 2013-14: 58th Annual Report, The Registrar of Newspapers for India; Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Govt. of India.