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’.

**Key Words:** Local Press, Assam, Cable Channels, Emergent Media, Cable Network, Glocalization.