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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Percentage (total number of news channels)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hindi*</td>
<td>28</td>
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<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tamil</td>
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<td>Telegu</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Malayalam</td>
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<td>Kannada</td>
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<td>Bengali</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>Marathi</td>
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<td>Punjabi</td>
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<td>Oriya</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assamese</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Urdu</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gujrati</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bhojpuri</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Not Available</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global languages; ‘minor’ languages</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National languages (English; Hindi*)</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional languages</td>
<td>50</td>
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</tbody>
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Table 1: Language-wise breakdown of news channels


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, ULFA⁴ (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 daily newspapers, 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. 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 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 subdivisions, 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.

[^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
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 valley⁸ 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

⁸The 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 missionaries⁹ 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.