Acknowledgement

The study of the Press and Its Social Responsibility in Northeast India: A Content Analysis has been like an arduous journey – strenuous but rewarding nevertheless. The study took me through vast quantity of data comprising of 312 issues of newspapers, 24450 news reports, editorials, articles and letters to the editor which appeared in The Assam Tribune and The Shillong Times, spread over three years. The extensive analysis of newspaper content under various criteria and the nature of the analysis, have certainly been a very enriching experience.

Why did I study newspapers? I owe much to the print media and my association goes back to the time I learnt to read and write. This study is both an acknowledgement of the power of the press and a tribute. The press today is undergoing rapid changes, and its survival is being challenged in unprecedented ways, thanks to the television, Internet and other new media. Therefore this study is prompted by a desire to remind the press of its social responsibility, to study its strengths and weaknesses, and potential to overcome the crisis it is confronting today.

While reading the interpretation of the data and the conclusions, one might get the impression that the study is negative and overly critical of the newspapers in general and of the two newspapers chosen for the research in particular. While such a perception is not totally unfounded, I must admit that the study of an issue as pertinent as the social responsibility of the press, was born of a deep sense of appreciation for the newspapers on the one hand, and the great expectations that the researcher and almost all readers have of the daily newspapers to which most people habitually turn every morning.
Hence, any criticism of the way the newspaper functions is not intended to cast aspersions on the press or to ignore the struggles and challenges that the people involved in the newspaper industry face. One cannot underestimate the commitment, hard work and team spirit involved in bringing out the newspaper every morning without fail in rain and sunshine. Most readers instinctively turn to the daily newspaper as a credible source of information. They trust their papers. The study is hence a sincere effort to understand the duties and responsibilities of the press to society and individuals.

One might notice that a lot of examples and models of content analysis cited in this study are of American or European origin. The reason is not lack of appreciation for what is Indian but this has been necessitated by the fact that journalism as an academic discipline, as well as other media studies have been pioneered by scholars and institutes in the West, particularly the United States of America. Much of Indian journalism has faithfully followed the laws, standards and practices of the press in the West or adapted them. We may also observe the near absence of content analysis of newspaper data in our country. I feel that this is a serious lacunae as well as a challenge to social scientists and media professionals to respond to. A country which is linguistically and socio-culturally so diverse as India needs to undertake serious research based on newspaper content analysis.

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George Plathottam