Chapter III
METHODOLOGY
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3.1 AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of the study is to understand the nature and extent of social issues covered by the language press of Cachar district of Assam.

3.2 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

GENERAL OBJECTIVE:

The general objective of the study is to measure the sensitivity of the newspapers published from Silchar, a district headquarters and the epicentre of socio-political movements in southern Assam.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES:

The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

- To study the nature and extent of coverage of social issues by two leading Bengali newspapers of Cachar district.
- To find out the pattern of the coverage of social issues in the newspapers under discussion.
- To find out the relative importance given to social issues originating in local areas and the outside.
- To find out the readers' response towards the coverage of social issues in these newspapers.
- To find out the editorial emphasis on social issues in terms of editorial page content of the two newspapers.
3.3 **RATIONALE OF THE STUDY**

A study of review of literature shows that the present study of the nature and extent of the coverage of social issues by the language press in Cachar district of Assam is the first of its kind. Thus, the research findings are expected to provide an assessment of the nature and extent of social issues covered by the Bengali newspapers of this region.

The rationale behind selection of the two newspapers namely, *Dainik Jugasankha* and *Samayik Prasanga* was that they are the two largest circulated Bengali language newspapers of Cachar district of Barak Valley, which is a Bengali dominating area and concerned about the social issues.

3.4 **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Since the study is by nature exploratory, the researcher has formulated the following research questions:

1. What is the coverage pattern of the newspapers in terms of placement under discussion towards the issues framed by the researcher?
2. What is the comparative percentage of local issues covered in the newspapers under discussion?
3. What is the level of sensitivity indicated by the frequency of coverage in the select newspapers on social issues?
4. What are the most important issues among the social issues covered by the select newspapers?
5. What is the level of comparative importance accorded to issues identified by the select newspapers?
6. What are the issues focused upon in the editorial writings of the concerned newspapers?
7. What is the point of convergence in editorial pieces in the two newspapers, if any?
8. What is the level of sensitivity among the opinion pieces on the social issues identified by the researcher in the two newspapers?
The study is designed for exploratory research to understand the nature of social issues covered by the language press. So no hypothesis is formulated here. The findings of this study are supposed to generate new problems and hypotheses for studies that might be conducted on related fields later.

3.5 METHODOLOGY

Content analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the context of their use. As a ‘technique’, content analysis involves specialized procedures. As a research technique, content analysis provides new insights, increases a researchers’ understanding of particular phenomena, or involves practical actions.

Techniques are expected to be reliable. More specifically, research techniques should result in findings that are replicable. That is, researchers working in different points in time and perhaps under different circumstances should get the same results when applying the same technique to the same data. Replicability is the most important form of reliability.

Scientific research must also yield valid results, in the sense that the research effort is open for careful scrutiny and the resulting claims can be upheld in the face of independently available evidence. The methodological requirements of reliability and validity are not unique to but make particular demands on content analysis.

A content analysis—both qualitative and quantitative of two leading Bengali newspapers of Cachar district was used as a research method. The data were collected from the two editions between January and April 2010 and the news contents of social issues were analyzed to ascertain how the selected newspapers covered the social issues. The unit of analysis was the news item which was operationally defined as any item on a timely event with a current dateline, an account of that event reported by the paper’s own
correspondent, or staff reporter. However, news items include editorials and post editorials.

3.5.1 ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF CONTENT ANALYSIS

Content analysis offers several advantages to researchers who consider using it. In particular, content analysis:

1. Looks directly at communication via texts or transcripts and hence gets at the central aspect of social interaction
2. Can be used to interpret texts for purposes such as the development of expert systems (since knowledge and rules can both be coded in terms of explicit statements about the relationships among concepts)
3. Is an unobtrusive means of analyzing interactions
4. Can allow for both quantitative and qualitative operations
5. Can provide valuable historical/cultural insights over time through analysis of texts
6. Allows closeness to text which can alternate between specific categories and relationships and also statistically analyzes the coded form of the text.

Content analysis is not free from certain disadvantages. In particular, content analysis:

1. Can be extremely time consuming and is often laborious and tedious
2. Is subject to increased error, particularly when relational analysis is used to attain a higher level of interpretation
3. Is often devoid of theoretical base, or attempts too liberally to draw meaningful inferences about the relationships and impacts implied in a study
4. Is inherently reductive, particularly when dealing with complex texts.
5. Can be difficult to automate or computerize.
Woodrum (1984) lists the advantages of content analysis as follows:

1. It is a safe method in the sense that if the researcher found that a portion of the necessary information was missing or incorrectly coded, it is possible to return to the text and supplement the missing data. That is not always possible in experimental or survey research.
2. It is a shoe-string methodology, which is typically labour-intensive and requires minimal capital investment.
3. This research technique focuses directly on the symbolic message patterns of the communication and facilitates the use of quantitative techniques for drawing theoretically relevant inferences from data.
4. It has the advantage of forcing researchers to specify category criteria and assess their success in measuring qualitative phenomena.
5. It is an unobtrusive research technique.

Other limitations of this research technique include the following:

1. Symbols are processed and coded according to the attribution given by a coder.
2. The reliability and validity issues in content analysis still remain unresolved. (Krippendorf, 1980).
3. Sometimes it is difficult to locate messages relevant to the research questions.
4. The method cannot be used to test casual relationships between variables. (Chadwick et al., 1984).

3.5.2 VALIDITY

The problem of validity arises because measurement in the social sciences is, with very few exceptions, indirect. Under such circumstances, researchers are never completely certain that they are measuring the precise property they intend to measure. Validity is concerned with the question, “Is one measuring what one thinks one is measuring?” For example, does electoral turnout measure political development? One agreement with the
statement- “This world is run by a few people in power, and there is not much the little guy can do about it” an indicator of the variable “alienation”? Clearly it is always necessary to gather some sort of evidence which provides confidence that a measuring device does in fact measure what it appears to measure.

Three basic kinds of validity can be distinguished, each of which is concerned with a different aspect of the measurement situation: Content Validity, Empirical Validity, and Construct Validity. Each of these three types includes several kinds of evidence and has special value under certain conditions. As the analysis of the present study has been done on the basis of Content Validity, let us explore some of the common varieties.

**CONTENT VALIDITY**

There are two common varieties of content validity: face validity and sampling validity. Face validity rests on the investigator’s subjective evaluation as to the validity of a measuring instrument. In practice, face validity does not relate to the question of whether an instrument measures that which the researcher wishes to measure: rather, it concerns the extent to which it measures that which appears to measure according to the researcher’s subjective assessment. For example, an investigator intends to measure the variable “liberalism” by a questionnaire consisting of ten statements. After making up the questionnaire, the researcher reviews each statement to assess its content as to the extent to which it is related to “liberalism”. To ascertain this assessment, the researcher might consult a number of specialists (judges). If there is agreement among the judges, the researcher will presumably contend that the questionnaire does not lack face validity and that, consequently, it measures “liberalism”. This agreement among the judges would impair the face validity of a measuring instrument.

The main problem with face validity is that there are no replicable rules for evaluating the measuring instrument and one has to rely entirely on subjective judgment. Nevertheless, face validity serves a significant function.
in the process of constructing and formulating measuring instruments. A researcher who constructs an instrument must rely, first and foremost, on his or her own skill and judgment: at later stages, he or she can validate the instrument by performing other validity tests.

The primary concern of sampling validity is whether a given population of situations or behavior is adequately sampled by the measuring instrument in question. That is, does the content of the instrument adequately represent the content population of the property being measured? The underlying assumption of sampling validity is that every variable has a content population consisting of an infinite number of items (statements, questions, or indicators), and that a highly valid instrument constitutes a representative sample of these items. In practice, problems arise with the definition of a content population, since this is a theoretical and not an empirical population. These problems impair the effectiveness of sampling validity as a test of an instrument’s validity. However, sampling validity has an important advantage: it requires the researcher to become acquainted with all the items that are known to belong to the content population. Sampling validity is especially common in innovative research, where investigators attempt to construct instruments and employ them for the first time. After the instruments have been used its validity can be evaluated by other tests.

RELIABILITY

The subject of reliability would not occupy a central place in the methodological literature if the measuring instruments used by social scientists were fully valid. In many instances validity evidence is almost entirely lacking; one has to evaluate the measuring instrument with respect to other characteristics and assume its validity. A frequently used method for evaluating an instrument is its degree of reliability.

Reliability is an indication of the extent to which a measure contains variable errors; that is, errors that differed from individual (or some other object) to individual during any one measuring instance, and that varied
from time to time for a given individual measured twice by the same instrument. For example, if one measures the length of a given object in two points of time with the same instrument –say, a ruler- and gets slightly different results, the instrument contains variable errors. Because of the indirect nature of measurements in the social sciences, the errors that occur when social variables are measured are likely to be much greater than those which occur when physical variables are measured. Factors such as momentary absent-mindedness, ambiguous instructions, and technical difficulties (a pencil breaks while the subject is filling in a questionnaire) may cause the introduction of variable errors. These errors are called variable errors because the amount of error varies from one individual to the next, and also because the amount of error is different for a given individual each time he or she is tested (Helmstadter, 1970).

However for the present study Parallel-forms technique has been used which is one way of overcoming the two limitations inherent in the test-retest method. This technique requires two forms of a measuring instrument that may be considered parallel. The two forms are then administered to a group of persons (or other objects), and the two sets of measures (scores) are correlated to obtain an estimate of reliability. (Gulliksen, 1950).

### 3.6 SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

For the study, purposive sampling method has been used and the newspapers have been chosen as per the purpose of the study.

### 3.7 SAMPLE SIZE

The universe for the present study comprises of all the issues of the two selected dailies during the period of four months, i.e., from January 01, 2010 to April 30, 2010. Thus the study consisted of 120 copies per daily (31+28+31+30=120). Thus a total of 240 issues of the two dailies have been covered for the study. Excluding the 5(five) holidays following public holidays (15th January, 27th January, 1st March, 15th April and 16th April)
during January and April there were also some other days when the researcher could not get the newspaper. The missing issues of *Dainik Jugasankha* are of 2nd January, 12th February and 17th February. The missing issues of *Samayik Prasanga* are of 3rd January, 26th January and 28th February. Thus, a total of 224 issues have been covered for the study (112 each of both the newspapers).

3.8 DATA ANALYSIS

The data was analyzed using SPSS tool- a comprehensive and flexible statistical analysis and data management solution. All the figures pertaining to the study was prepared and organized accordingly using the MS Excel tool.

3.9 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The present study assumes vital importance not only from academic point of view but also from understanding the trend of media reportage by the language dailies. The concept of credibility, accountability and performance is increasingly found in the discussions at various forums about public institutions like the judiciary, the executive, and the legislature. Since checks and balances control the judiciary, the legislature, and the executive, the fourth estate i.e. the press has no such mechanism to control it, except in certain circumstances where the law can be invoked against the media. Contrary to these institutions media have the duty to represent the case of public to the other three institutions for public good and this duty gives power to the media to be used for any purpose.

Hence the study recorded the pattern of coverage of social issues and the nature and extent to which these are covered which would help in the promotion of further research and offer a value addition to the field of knowledge as well as provide a proper framework for evaluating the perception of coverage pattern in any given universe.
3.10 UNIQUENESS OF THE STUDY

The uniqueness of the study lies in its inter-disciplinary approach. In the process, the study is of equal importance for mass communication academics, media industry, media management, social work, and other allied social science disciplines.