

# CONTENT ANALYSIS OF MEDIA COVERAGE OF NORTH EAST INDIA

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India is the habitat of diverse groups of people belonging to communities on the religious, ethnic, linguistic, regional and various other grounds. One of the important parts of India, the North East comprises of various groups of ethnicity and is home to more than 200 tribes. It is one of the most crucial regions as it shares more than 99% of its geographical boundary with China in North, Bhutan in the northwest, Bangladesh in south, and Myanmar in the east and is connected by mainland India with narrow strip of land of 22km called Siliguri famous as “Chicken’s Neck” in Northern West Bengal. North East India embraces the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim. Except Sikkim, the other seven states are clubbed into the group of Seven Sisters. The paper aims to explore the role of media in context of the Northeast India as it is important to undertake it case exclusively, as it differs from the states of mainland India in various manners. Ethnicity of Northeast people is in more proximity to ethnicity of people of South East Asia which serves as one of the major factors of difference between the northeast people and mainland Indians. The geographic location of the area is on the periphery of mainland India that widens the gap between states of mainland India and Northeast states. And most importantly the governing pattern of the region also differs from the time of pre independence till today with the adoption of policy of Inner Line Permit, policy of exclusion and partial exclusion by British administrators in colonial period and deployment of Autonomous District Council under Sixth Schedule of the Indian constitution.

## I. Review of Literature

People in North East India relate their ethnic, linguistic and racial traces to diverse parts of South Asia. J.B Fuller opines that “the province of Assam at the far northeastern corner of India is a museum of nationalities” and this is remarkably evident in the ethnic origins of various ethnic groups inhabiting the north east region. The process of occupying the region started with Austro-Asiatic group considered to be the first to inhabit. The present ethnic groups of Khasis and Jaintias residing in parts of Meghalaya are believed to belong to the lineage of Austro-Asiatic group. The same group of ethnicity traces its origin in China, Burma and Indonesia.

Mongoloids, mentioned as Kiratas in ancient Sanskrit literature are one of the largest ethnic groups populating the North East. They came from South and South West of the Asian continent. Of the Mongoloids, Bodos are largely represented among the tribes of Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura. The Meities of Manipur are also considered to be Mongoloids because of their physical appearance but linguistically they are more close to the Aryans. Arunachal Pradesh, comprising of 110 tribes and mixed racial composition have Mongoloids ethnicity in majority. Similarly in Mizoram, the Lushais and Hmars are considered to belong to the sub-category of Mongoloids.

The Garos residing in Meghalaya plateau are believed to have migrated from the southern side of central Tibet. It is believed that the people belonging to Khasi group are considered to have migrated from Southeast Asia, passing from the routes of Burma. The Kuki and the Chin presently occupying the larger parts of Manipur, Tripura and Mizo hills trace their origin in Southern China. Nagas settled in Nagaland and northern hills of Manipur are believed to have migrated from eastern Tibet. The policy of ‘partial exclusion’ Government of India Act 1919 stated that the Government in Council could reject any local law and make modifications. Such a provision restricted the ability of provincial legislature to legislate the partially excluded areas.

The present states of Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya constituted as the districts of Assam and the state of Arunachal Pradesh that was considered under the North East Frontier Agency was governed by the Governor of Assam, therefore considered under it. Manipur and Tripura were the princely states before independence; later in 1948 they merged with India and were grouped under ‘C’ states (previous name for Union Territories). The government of independent India found the need to govern north east region with exclusive treatment, realizing the nature of the region, different from other parts of India.

There is a sense of alienation among the people from North East and media has also not played a responsible role in bridging the gap between north east and mainland Indians. It has instead contributed in creating a kind of image

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between them about each other. People in mainland India believe that north east is all about tribal people, because of their looks, they are treated differently and often have to face racist remarks/comments.

According to Datta “the system of looking down upon northeast is driven by absence of cultural and psychological integration with the mainstream” (2000). Horam (1988) opines, “As soon as a Naga crosses north east India and ventures westwards, he is mistaken for a Thai, Cambodian, Chinese or Japanese and is treated as a foreigner. Even Indians fail to recognize them as Indians”. According to Subir Bhowmick, “the level of understanding and awareness about north east is poor, only a handful of people like Nandita Haksar, involved in human rights movement have taken interest. There is a disconnect between mainland civil society and civil society from the north-east.

## II. Research Design & Methods

Content analysis method was used with quantitative and qualitative approach to examine the coverage given to news from northeast in two National Dailies, ‘The Times of India’ and ‘The Hindu’. The study analyzed quality of coverage in terms of space, page and position allotted to the stories. The nature of news or the beat to which it belongs, was also taken into consideration. The pages studied were the national section and the special section on any occasion like ‘Dance of Democracy on elections’ (TOI), ‘Women under attack’. The study was done over a period of two months, November and December 2013. Regarding, The Hindu, analysis of print was done for the month of November and web for the month of December.

## III. Results & Discussion

Online archives of Times of India (TOI) and The Hindu were calculated on the total number of stories. The total number of stories allotted to the national section of Times of India in the month of November was 800 and 803 in December. Of these the number of stories which dealt with Delhi and the news stories which were common to India were excluded. Table 1 shows distribution of stories published on different states, metropolitan cities got the highest coverage. If we analyze the other parts, south Indian states of Chennai, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh are covered fairly, the state of Kerela had less number of stories. North India has the highest coverage with Uttar Pradesh getting the maximum space, followed by Punjab, Jammu and Kashmir, Bihar, Haryana, only Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand get less coverage. The western India also gets enough coverage in comparison to other parts, only Gujarat

got sufficient coverage, other states like Rajasthan and Goa are scantily covered. The Eastern parts also get enough coverage with Kolkata and Bihar getting a large number of stories on the national page, along with these states, Jharkhand also got fair coverage, only Chhatisgarh lagged behind. The central part of India is on the peak in terms of coverage with Maharashtra securing extensive coverage and Madhya Pradesh has also been high on the ladder. Finally coming to the North East, the states of North East are given least coverage among all other the states of India.

It is important to observe the special trend that why the states of northeast are given least coverage, the average number of stories allotted is just one or two. Assam secured a better coverage in comparison of other north-eastern states with four to six stories. However if we locate the coverage of Assam among the entire nation, it is equivalent to the least covered states in comparison to other parts of India. The states of north east are marginally presented.

In, The Hindu, the total number of stories in November was 1833, among which only 5% were of the north east. Table 2 presents distribution of stories of northeast. Assam got the maximum coverage. Table 3 presents number of stories allotted to states of Northeast in December on Web Edition of The Hindu. In the web edition of The Hindu for the month of December, Tripura had the highest number of stories whereas the state of Meghalya had none.

Table 4 presents number of stories of north east in Times of India in November and December. In December maximum numbers of stories were in the range of 300-350 words, which meant sufficiently a big article on a page. This can be seen as a positive change in terms of the pattern of reporting and coverage. However in the month of December maximum number of stories were in range of words from 50-100 and 100-150 which means a space equal to snippets or briefs. Another interesting pattern observed is the care taken by the editors regarding spellings and grammars. However in the stories of north east it is observed that there is no space given between words and with incorrect spellings. It connotes attitude of ignorance towards these news stories and shows what importance it carries for mainstream newspapers in Delhi. Position of the news story allotted on a page describes its significance or value to the newspaper. The interesting fact observed regarding the position is that all the corners of a page are reserved for news from the northeast. In month of November, except two stories related to Sikkim’s achievement on lonely planet India and about popularity of choirs from Shillong to Chennai, all the major happenings or news are positioned at the corner of the page which

can be easily missed by the readers. In December, except two stories dealing with President Pranab Mukherjee's visit to northeast and a cultural story on Manipur festival, mostly the other stories were published on corner positions and stories which were published in the centre, also seem to be lost, because of the advertisements.

Table 5 present's number of stories with number of words in The Hindu. Maximum number of stories was in range of 50-100 and 100-150, which constitutes the space for briefs or snippets. Also like Times of India, the position of stories is generally in the last of the list of news stories. And in web edition too, North East stories are generally clubbed in to the category of other states rather than in the national category.

Pie Chart 1 shows Beat distribution of North East stories in Times of India, 47% of the stories belong to news of murders, encounters, accidents and rapes. 21 % of the stories are political, but here the point to be noted is that these stories largely deal with political news related to the Centre and do not talk about internal politics of the region. 21% of the news is of development and positive stories like Sikkim's achievements and bravery award given to a girl for saving life for children during hijack of school van. This is a positive change observed in the pattern of reporting North East and remaining are in category of civil and others. However, civil news is only covered when related to other parts of Eastern states like Kolkata, Bihar and Odisha. The news story with the heading 'Shortage rumors send salt past 100/kg in eastern belt' published on 10 November, 2013, this news is shared by all the Eastern states of India. Another positive change observed is that, The Hindu carried out more culture related pictures of northeast, a remarkable initiative to glorify the culture of this region.

Pie Chart 2 presents the beat distribution stories of North East in the Hindu. The beat distribution is almost fairly the same, 40% of stories fall under the category of killings, rapes, protests, encounters, accidents, 27% of news is political. The different pattern in The Hindu is that here political news deals more with the internal politics of the region. Civil news constitutes of 14.6%, and a positive change is that more of civil news is of the positive changes or of development in the northeast region. There is focus on development news and along with it there are stories related to culture of the North East. The comparative analysis shows that The Hindu had more diversity in terms of stories to Times of India. But however both the national dailies failed to give adequate coverage to the North East in comparison to other parts of the country.

## IV. Conclusion

There are certain factors which are believed to affect media coverage of northeast India. One of the persistent excuses given to justify mainstream media's behavior towards north east is that it doesn't get advertisements which imply that there is less audience and readers for north east news. But this is a point to be understood in depth, when audience is ready to serve with the news of states of South India, Western states and Eastern states, then why audience treat news of North East differently. During past couple of years number of migrants from North East to cities like Delhi and Mumbai has increased, but what is the source of information for these people. Aren't they counted among the audience of mainstream media? There is also a belief that as the news of North East barely appears in media, similarly the professionals in mainstream media from the north east also constitute a very small percentage. Syed Zarir Hussain puts forth the issue of babudom in the mainstream media. He opines that "babudom has entered the mainstream media; the persons at the helm of affairs have never been to the field. So they do not know about the pulse of the people. Editors want stories based on violence and militancy". It connotes that only violence or something which is 'sexy or juicy' about the region can make it appear in the mainstream media. There is also need for research for investigating the ownership patterns in detail of mainstream media. Do they make news only when there is a racist assault and there is nothing which could be important for them to be informed about?

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**Table 1: Number of stories allotted to states on national page in Times of India**

November, 2013		December, 2013	
States	No. of Stories	States	No. of Stories
Uttar Pradesh	51 (17%)	Uttar Pradesh	38 (14.6%)
Mumbai	45 (15%)	Mumbai	38 (14.6%)
Kolkata	28 (9.7%)	Kolkata	33 (12.6%)
Bihar	18 (6%)	Chennai	24 (9.2%)
Chennai	16 (5.5%)	Hyderabad	16 (6.15%)
Karnataka	16 (5.5%)	Karnataka	16 (6.15%)
Jharkhand	16 (5.5%)	Jammu and Kashmir	15 (5.7%)
Gujarat	15 (5.2%)	Gujarat	13 (5%)
Hyderabad	14 (4.8%)	Bihar	8 (3.07%)
Bhopal	10 (3.4%)	Harayana	8 (3.07%)
Kerela	10 (3.4%)	Goa	7 (2.6%)
Jammu and Kashmir	8 (2.7%)	Jharakhand	7 (2.6%)
Punjab	7 (2.4%)	Assam	6 (2.3%)
Harayana	5 (1.7%)	Punjab	5 (1.92%)
Himachal Pradesh	5 (1.7%)	Uttarakhand	3 (1.15%)
Chhatisgarh	4 (1.3%)	Kerela	3 (1.15%)
Assam	4 (1.3%)	Himachal Pradesh	2 (0.76%)
Uttarakhand	3 (1.04%)	Rajasthan	2 (0.76%)
Meghalaya	2 (0.71%)	Manipur	2 (0.76%)
Mizoram	1 (0.34%)	Chhatisgarh	1 (0.38%)
Manipur	1 (0.34%)	Tripura	1 (0.38%)
Sikkim	1 (0.34%)	Nagaland	1 (0.38%)

**Table 2: Number of stories allotted to North East in print edition of The Hindu**

States	Number of Stories
Assam	30 (1.6%)
Arunachal Pradesh	9 (0.49%)
Manipur	9 (0.49%)
Meghalaya	15 (0.8%)
Tripura	5 (0.2%)
Nagaland	5 (0.2%)
Mizoram	7 (0.7%)

**Table 4: Number of stories of North East with range of words in Times of India**

Range of Words	No. of stories (Nov, 2013)	No. of stories (Dec, 2013)
>50	0	1
50-100	2	3
100-150	1	3
150-200	2	1
200-250	0	0
250-300	1	0
300-350	3	0
350-400	0	1

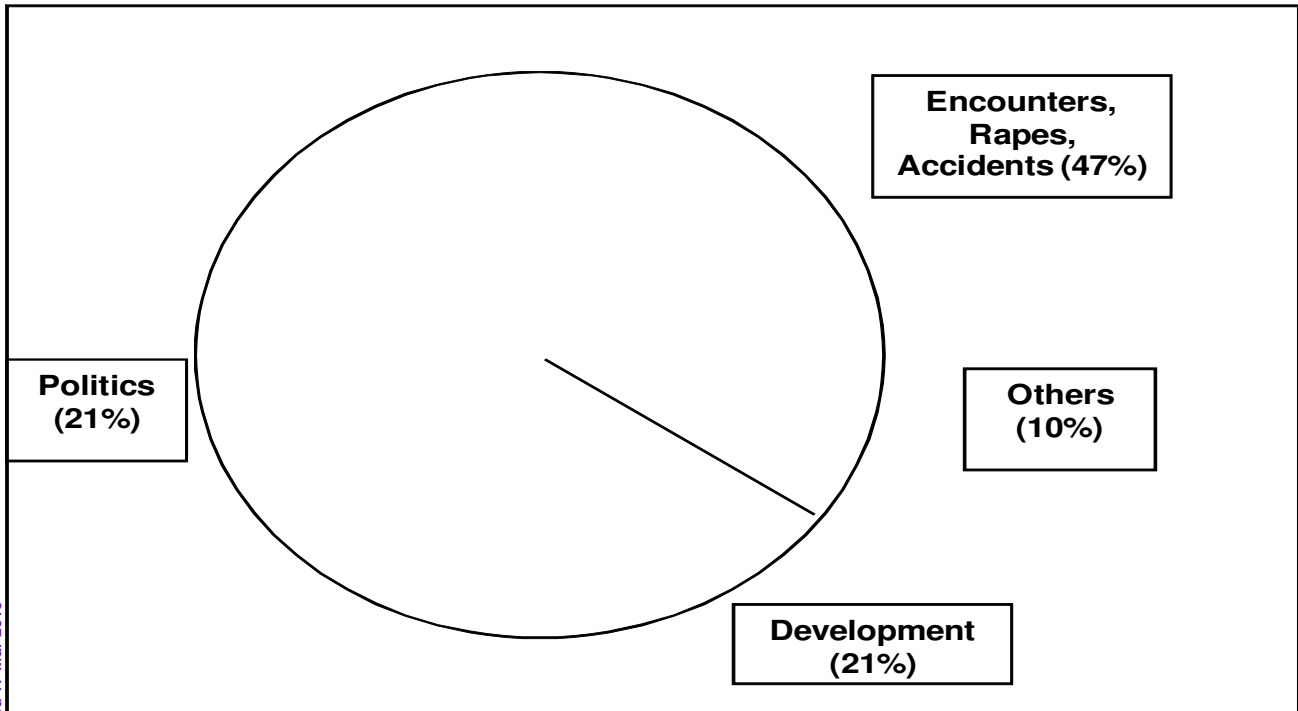
**Table 3: Number of stories allotted to states of North East in December on Web Edition of The Hindu**

States	Number of Stories
Tripura	15
Manipur	11
Assam	8
Mizoram	7
Nagaland	2
Arunachal Pradesh	1
Meghalaya	0

**Table 5: Number of North East stories allotted with the following range of words in The Hindu**

Range of Words	No. of words given to stories (Nov, 2013)	No. of words given to stories (Dec, 2013)
>50	11	4
50-100	21	7
100-150	23	19
150-200	14	10
200-250	6	2
250-300	5	5
300-350	2	2
350-400	0	3
400<	2	0

Pie Chart 1: Beat distribution of North East stories in Times of India



Pie Chart 2: Beat distribution of North East stories in Times of India

