

Chapter – V

Major Findings

The research project within its ambit has combined both content analysis and a survey on the basis of close ended questionnaire to arrive at the findings.

As mentioned the researcher had conducted both readers' survey and content analysis for the purpose of the study. The content analysis covered two major newspapers of the state, "*The Meghalaya Times*" and "*The Shillong Times*" and two magazines *The North East Today* and *The Eastern Panorama*. Both the newspapers and magazines were scanned over a period of one year. The newspapers were scanned for analysis of certain items concerning the general welfare of the people of the state. It was more of an item analysis to find out which issues were perceived by the newspapers and if this perception correlates with the perception of the readers. The awareness of the readers was measured through a close ended questionnaire.

The reader-response survey was conducted among purposively chosen 100 newspaper readers who are capable of reading English newspapers. Out of these, 84 respondents were found to be reading the newspapers regularly and their main source of information still happens to be newspapers only while 16 respondents, i.e., 16% depend on other sources also for news about the state. It needs to be mentioned that newspaper readers depend on these newspapers for stories about the state and the city of Shillong.

Objective No 1- To study the role and performance of press in terms of surveillance on Governments action on citizen's rights for a healthy urban life,

It is found on the basis of scanning newspapers published from Shillong that Meghalaya newspapers are virtually indifferent to perform surveillance on the action of the Government. One of the indicators to measure govt. action is to trace how many pro-active or investigative stories are published by newspapers on perceived action-inaction of the Government agencies. It is found that Meghalaya newspapers seem to have no penchant for publishing pro-active or investigative stories. The source of any news story on the affairs of the state is essentially a press release issued by the state government. The number of proactive or investigative stories is thoroughly insignificant and hence not included in a tabular form within the scope of the study.

The magazines were also not very proactive in terms of covering inaction on the government front.

Objective No 2- To look at how the press in Shillong informs its readers about the health and environmental concern

The researcher had conducted a reader's survey to explore this objective. The present research work identified coal mining, uranium mining, deforestation, alcoholism and drug menace as some of the most relevant issues for newspapers to sensitize and develop awareness leading to opinion formation among the readers of "The Meghalaya Times" and "*The Shillong Times*" as most probable pressing concern for these newspapers to develop. It is found from the reader's survey that not even 50% of the newspaper readers are able to muster up their memory to remember any significant campaign launched by these

newspapers on these issues. On the issue of uranium and coal mining, awareness is a little high with 62% readers remembering some news reports by these two leading and most influential dailies of Meghalaya. Only 45% readers are found to be happy with what they have read in these newspapers about alcoholism and drug menace. 27% people could remember what they read about deforestation while 31% readers could remember something on sanitation.

Objective No 3- To know how the press in Shillong correlates the activities of citizens groups with demand of the public in Shillong.

The respondents, as have already been told, depend largely for state and Shillong city news on these newspapers. They were asked if they remembered any campaign launched by local pressure groups, which means NGO s in this case on the issues identified within the scope of the research as important issues. 31% respondents reported that they could find certain campaigns launched by the pressure groups which got reported in these newspapers. On the other hand, 34% readers reported that they could not remember any such campaigned and 35% reported that had no opinion. These findings clearly delineate the fact that there was a significant absence of newspaper and civic group correlation. The respondents were further asked if they remembered any special campaign launched by the civic groups and NGOs. The answer pattern remains the same with 31% saying in the affirmative while nearly 70% either contested the claim or feigned their ignorance.

Objective No 4- To know how far the press is interested in shaping public opinion

One of the significant indicators in assessing the interest of the media houses in shaping up public opinion or creating salience on a given issue is to trace if they have launched a campaign on a given issue. Accordingly the readers of “The Meghalaya Times” and Shillong times were asked if they remember any campaign launched by these two newspapers perceived as important within the ambit of current research work. 24% readers reported that they remembered a campaign launched on sanitation issues, 36% readers were aware of a campaign on health and environment issues, 33% reported their awareness of a campaign on uranium and coal mining issue, 28% could recall a press campaign on alcoholism and drug menace and only 27% could remember a campaign launched by the press on deforestation. Not even half of the respondents could recall a press campaign launched by these two newspapers and that throws to light the lackadaisical approach of these newspapers to these issues of concern.

Objective No. 5- To find out how the press is spreading awareness on the climate change issues in Shillong

Environment and climate change related issues are significantly important in the context of Shillong, Garo hills and Jaintia hills in particular and Meghalaya in general. The responses of the readers were obtained on the effort of Meghalaya press on the issues of deforestation or uranium mining which are significant contributors to climate change discourse already. Even the readers were asked to respond directly with regard to environmental and climate change issues and how the press fared on the issues of climate change. The respondents

were asked if they remember any story in the last one year on environment and climate change. 40% of the respondents could remember reading stories on the issue in these two newspapers while 44% responded in the negative. 16% of the respondents could not opine on the issue. They were further asked if they remembered any campaign launched by these two newspapers on the issue of environment and climate change. 43% respondents could not remember anything on the issue while 36% mentioned that they had observed such campaigns launched by the newspaper. 21% respondents were without a response on the issue.

Research Question wise Findings

The research was designed to investigate on the role on press in Shillong on environmental and social issues. The issues were identified as Water wastage , Uranium and Coal mining Deforestation and global warming, Sanitation to BPL, HIV/AIDS (Health) Pressure Groups. In connection to the issues the following research questions were framed.

1) What is the role of the press in Shillong on the issue of water wastage in the city?

The researcher has collected a data for a period of one year in which minimal amount of reporting was done on water wastage issues. The data reveals that negligible amount of space was given to water wastage the city is known to have faced acute water shortage in passed times. According to the space analysis done by the researcher only a minimal of 30% space was devoted to the crucial issue of water wastage. Space was calculated for the span of one year and the total news hole came up as 134,400 from which only 30% was devoted to the issues of water wastage. The weight age of the news is decided by its

placement in the newspaper. The upper half of the newspaper attracts more attention, but reports on water wastage had very less representation on the upper half only minimal of 12% of news was represented in the upper half.

The magazines on the other hand had no say in the matter

2) What is the role of Shillong press on the issue of uranium and coal mining in the state?

Uranium and coal mining is one of the pressing issues in the state which is often an issues on representation by the pressure groups. According to the space analysis done highest amount of space was accorded to the issues of uranium and coal mining with 70% of space give to the issues from the news hole of 134,400. As per the data collected it is seen that the highest amount of representation was given to the issue of Uranium and coal mining.40% of the news was devoted in the upper half with 40 % being reported on the issue of uranium and coal mining. The region is one of the most fragile ecosystem and the issues on uranium and coal mining attracts a lot of media attention. With the central govt. taking up the mining issues, the local newspapers get a good from the issue.

Both the magazines had carried one article on the burning issues on uranium.

3) What is the role of Press in Meghalaya on the issue of deforestation in Shillong and its adjoining areas?

Deforestation is a global issue and the impact of deforestation can be seen in the local media also. According to the space calculated 60% of space was dedicated over a span of one year from 134,400 news hole. But to mention the impact of deforestation is discussed in the papers but the local angle and the deforestation of local forest is hardly depicted in the papers. It is an interesting observation in which deforestation and global warming though represented paper are not of any importance to the state. Few exceptions can be seen which depicts the deforestation of local forest.

The magazines were in sensitive to the issues.

4) What is the role of press to provide proper sanitation facility to the BPL category of people in Shillong?

Sanitation to BPL got minimal representation in the Shillong media according to the data collected by the researcher only 30% of space was dedicated to the issues from the total news hole of 134,400. There was zero representation of sanitation in the upper half of the newspaper. It is one of the major concerns as the city is going through an unplanned urbanization where there is an influx of people from rural areas and also from the other states for jobs and better opportunity. The city is known as one of the educational hubs as compared to the other northeastern states. None of the magazines showed concern about the issue.

5) What is the role of Shillong Press in terms of creating civic awareness among its readers?

According to the data analysis conducted by the researcher it is observed that the press plays a minimal role in creating awareness. The press is known to the fourth estate and is supposed to play a crucial role in the development of any nation but when it comes to the hilly station of northeast its condition is in a dilapidated state the role. The press plays no role in creating awareness regarding any of the concerned issues. According to the analysis press releases are a major source of information for the media regarding the selected issues. Any kind of reporting is hardly done as there are no byline stories in the paper which implies that the condition of reporting is poor.

6) What is the role of Press in creating awareness on alcoholism and drug menace among the youth in the city?

The states of Northeastern Region is known as the drug hub as it shares international borders, but the media seems to give a deaf ear to pressing issue of drugs as only 30% representation was given to the issues from 134,400 news hole.

An article on drug menace was taken up by “The North East Today”

7) Whether the press prefers any particular campaign taken up by any particular pressure group?

There is a 50-50 representation of the pressure groups on the newspapers. According to the data analysis NGO's are well represented in the papers. The newspapers in the state sole depend on press releases so the NGO's get well representation in the papers. From the total news hole of 134,400, news from NGO's is carried as high as 50%. The magazines had not taken up any issue on the pressure groups.

8) What is the role of press overall in terms of creating civic and environmental awareness?

The media have therefore proven to be the main sources for information about climate change from whom the “public draws most of its knowledge. While issue attention is a basic characteristic of media coverage, it is also highly relevant, because it signals an issue’s perceived importance to the media’s audience and has effects on them. The attention for an issue relative to others, i.e. its rank on the media “agenda”, has “agenda setting” effects for agenda setting on the climate change issues. Therefore, issue attention may influence how audience members act upon these issues, including the actions governments and parliaments take in the areas of public concern. Media can make or break an issue. But the media scene in the state gives a different aspect of reporting were the roles of press can be questioned.

The intention to take up the research was to know the effect of urbanization in the hill station. With development taking place at a rapid pace it is very important to know if it is planned or unplanned development. According to the research conducted there is an unplanned development happening at rapid pace and the media in Shillong is giving a deaf ear to the issues which are present. The media needs to be more proactive.

The magazines are also insensitive towards the environment issues.

5.1 Limitation

Media related research on environment issues has followed much of the same path as media and communication research on any other social problem or issue. It is not surprising therefore that such research embodies many of the same weakness of communication research generally. The sample size taken was too small. Larger samples could not be considered. It would have been wonderful if an enhanced survey could be conducted on a large scale, including students from colleges and schools, there would have been a conclusive finding. Under the above circumstances, all conclusions are necessarily tentative and open to debate. Nevertheless, the study could suggest the policy makers to take note of the findings to get a nuanced picture for better diffusion of climate change information. Climate affects societies in many ways, and climate variability and change are important factors for societal development. Though it is considered and an accepted notion that media have an overwhelming capacity in terms of creating awareness on any given issue, it is found that there has been very awareness of climate affects among the respondents. The research is limited by the fact that some more newspaper samples could have been undertaken and it would have been able to reduce the sampling error.

5.2 Recommendation:

The results show, first of all, that climate change is a relevant media topic in all countries.

Public understanding of global warming is treated as a problem of common resource that is yet to be adequately resolved. Surveys of public understanding of this and other environmental problems typically find that there is a serious problem with the proper understanding. Problems of climate change impacts human society over a long period of time. This lack of instantaneity affects the rise of awareness about the issue. To combat

this, media need to launch regular campaigns which is conspicuously absent in Indian media in general and regional and local media in particular. Though several studies of media effects have also concluded that media have little or no effect, but it has also been seen that sustained media campaigns have been able to create or increase awareness.

It is found that most people have heard about environmental problems such as air or water pollution, they often failed to make any connection between the problem and important causes, such as overpopulation. Instead, when asked about pollution, people tend to think about neither causes nor consequences of pollution, but rather of instances such as smog or garbage. When causes are not well understood, it is clearly difficult to devise effective solutions to a problem.

Communication, both mass and interpersonal, holds the key to improvement in public understanding of environmental problems.

Despite these shortcomings, the extensive media coverage of environmental problems is not entirely a futile effort. Agenda-setting studies have shown that media coverage is at least partly responsible for refocusing people's attention on environmental problems.

Conclusion

India should be concerned about climate change since this will have adverse socio-economic impacts on its people. The three main impacts are: those on agriculture, sea-level rise leading to submergence of coastal areas, and increased frequency of extreme events. Journalists ignore climate change as they do not know the technicalities involved; they hardly receive in-service training on climate change and fail to link ground realities with existing policies and politics. Scientists do not give climate change literature in a jargon-free language. The question of mass media as mirror as well as creator of culture undoubtedly remains one of the most debated issues in the scientific exploration of the relationship between mass media and society. The controversy between critical media sociologists, who emphasize the value-producing function of mass media, and empiricists, who are foremost interested in demonstrating how social reality is reflected in mass media, seems to have subsided in recent years, resulting in a compromise integrating both approaches. Much of the empirical research of the past decade points indeed in the direction of a creative, reinforcing or transforming cultural impact of mass media. Climate change is also a developmental issue of great concern for a developing country like India. This study reveals that there are some grey areas in climate change awareness among the study. Comparative studies on climate change communication are paramount to further our understanding of how societies take up, and subsequently react to, this global problem. We have argued that climate change is a major societal problem with global causes and consequences. Media coverage may increase societal awareness and knowledge of the issue, ideally fostering informed individual and collective actions. Moreover, climate change has remained on the news agenda for a long time and has become even more important over time.

Coming down to the state of affairs in regional or local journalism although in English language, it is clearly discernible that media in Meghalaya have failed to rise to the occasion. The hope of the media watchers that regional journalism has a steadfastly positive role to play in terms of enforcing democratic values by creating a sense of belonging to the immediate surrounding through creating awareness on issues touching upon the lives of the people in both short and long term has been belied. The newspapers under consideration are not seen to have much interest in revealing facts by exploring in depth, even issues like uranium mining or deforestation, both having critical impact in the lives of the people of the state. The newspapers under consideration during the period of the study have barely taken up the responsibility in doing investigative stories.

Secondly the styles of reporting delineated by these newspapers remind one of web journalism. These have acted merely as news dissemination tools without any eye on the serious ramifications of the issues. The open cast mining in Shillong and adjacent areas, especially in the Jaintia hills are largely overlooked. One must remember in this context that Apex court in the country has stopped this open cast mining. Any conscious citizen of Meghalaya would reveal that green cover in the state is declining while it has failed to catch the imagination of newspapers of the state. Emergence of regional journalism in the country had given birth to the hope that these newspapers would be to rekindle the spirit of democracy, enliven the public sphere by initiating vigilante journalism, but a thorough assessment of the printed performance of these newspapers put all those hopes under shadow of doubt.

The performance of magazine journalism in the state is equally dismal. Though these are published from Shillong and essentially cater to the Northeast region of the nation, these have shown an equal penchant for press released based journalism like their newspaper

counterparts. One has to remember that though the issues identified under the scope of the present research work were related to Meghalaya in particular, but the issues afflict the entire Northeast in general. These magazines have followed the trajectory followed by the national media which thrive on disaster reporting when it comes to Northeast.

Whether its civic journalism which essentially espouses a vigilant journalism and a close correlation between the audience and the media or the development of climate change awareness, everything has been put at the back burner by the media in the state. When one flips through the pages of the newspapers or the magazines of the state, one fails to understand that this state is standing poignantly at the brink of ecological disaster, the traditional system of fetching food is destroyed and environmental resources which are common property resources (CPR) are out of bounds for the commons. The discourses on environment and climate change are absolutely absent and have been replaced by the politics or violence. The media in the state have failed to understand that politics of violence or secessionism is an outcome of the destruction of CPR and only a spirited effort in reviving the environmental resources can change the entire gamut of political and economic discourse. Its high time media in the state start introspection and reinventing. This can only lead to a resurgent regional and local media.