

# **A Study of Media Representation with Reference to Reporting of Violence in Assam**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the award of the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

By

Payel Chakrabarti

Roll No. 09614113



Department of Humanities and Social Sciences

**Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati**

**Guwahati, India**

February 2016

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# **Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati**

Department of Humanities and Social Sciences

**Guwahati 781039**

**Assam, India**

## **Declaration**

I hereby declare that the thesis entitled “**A Study of Media Representation with Reference to Reporting of Violence in Assam**” is the result of investigation carried out by me at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati, under the supervision of Professor Liza Das and Dr Sambit Mallick. The work has not been submitted either in whole or in part to any other university/institution for a research degree.

IIT Guwahati  
February 2016

Payel Chakrabarti



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Guwahati 781039

Assam, India

## Certificate

This is to certify that Ms Payel Chakrabarti has prepared the thesis entitled “**A Study of Media Representation with Reference to Reporting of Violence in Assam**” for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati. The work was carried out under our general supervision and in strict conformity with the rules laid down for the purpose. It is the result of her investigation and has not been submitted either in whole or in part to any other university/institution for a research degree.

IIT Guwahati  
February 2016

Liza Das  
Supervisor

Sambit Mallick  
Co-Supervisor

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**List of abbreviations used in thesis text.**

AFSPA	Armed Forces (Special Powers) Acts
ANI	Asian News International
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BTAD	Bodoland Territorial Autonomous District
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CNN	Cable News and Network
DD	Doordarshan
ETV	Eenadu TV
IBN	Indian Broadcasting Network
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
KMSS	Krishak Mukti Sangram Samiti
NDFB	National Democratic Front of Bodoland
NDTV	New Delhi Television Limited
NE	Northeast
NSCN	National Socialist Council of Nagaland
NWS	News Wire Service
PCG	People's Consultative Group
PTI	Press Trust of India
TOI	Times of India
TRP	Television Rating Point
ULFA	United Liberation Front of Assam
UNI	United News of India

## **Preface**

Life today has heavily become media information centric. The role of media may be scrutinised and evaluated as perennial in constructing reality through its representations of places, people, events and society as a whole for a diverse group of media consumers to consume and believe. There are certain unpleasant facts that one would not like to remember and associate with his/her life or experience mediated. But the media representations often recreate such images for commercial benefit.

I have personally had experience of working in three television news channels of Assam for over a span of six years in the capacity of news producer, anchor and field reporter. As a working journalist in the region, I have witnessed the pressure exerted upon media practitioners to gather and produce saleable news. It has been more of market influence over journalism activity that is performed in the media industry. It is evident that media scenario may be deciphered in terms of corporatisation and commodification. With media ownership increasingly being concentrated in the hands of big business groups and prominent political affiliations, news gathering and media representation has been highly motivated and dictated by TRPs, circulation figures, generated revenue and profits.

The only mode of information dissemination among masses about the region is media; thus it becomes extremely important to study the media role in disseminating information, in creating image and perception among a greater audience. Today's commercialised media has been neglecting or seems to be unaware of the negative precedent that reports of violence have. This has even proved to be one of the reasons of no outsider wanting to venture into the region and also local intellectuals moving out to find peace and growth outside the region. Now the image is changing, by self realisation of the situation by the locals and with induction of national institutes that allow intermixing and exchange of ideas and thoughts. People stay back and even venture into the region's development with the strengthening of the idea of local liveable environment. If media representations facilitate, such issues would get a total face lift from the violent and fearful image of the region.

Media space and time is provided to incidents expected to be of massive potential, enough to grab mass attention. And thus media representation is often criticised of creating negative impact regarding the place, people and society though selective and excessive violence. In case of Assam and Northeast India as a whole, factual reporting has created a certain kind of inappropriate perception. My work experience in two private owned media houses (*DY365* and *Frontier TV*) and state broadcaster *Doordarshan* has provided me the understanding of the diverse approaches towards media representation, specifically reporting of violence in Assam. Most of the private television channels represent the region through stereotypical projection and has a huge following; whereas state owned channel try to cover a broader prospect of the region in its varied programmes but is unable to cover-up the perceptions already created, strengthened and reconfirmed by the private business players. My personal experience as a journalist working in Assam has certainly inspired me to undertake the research work on the topic and field leading to this thesis.

The thesis focuses on media reporting of violence specific to Assam. This study concentrates on patterned presentation of the region in regard to professional competence and social responsibility. In this regard interacting with residents of Guwahati, regional institutes and media experts; it is observed that media may play a very important role in reporting the changes being experienced in society and also changing the perception prevalent in the society.

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## **Abstract**

Media and entertainment industry may be said to be one of the most flourishing sectors in India which has grown immensely in last few decades. And moreover the media industry, mainly after liberalisation of the media sector, is a developing sector with developmental works, and newer methods applications and of technologies. This has raised business opportunities in Indian media and entertainment industry enormously, leading to extended scopes and areas of academic study in the field.

News about violence has become a priority in media communication today, especially in reference to Northeast India as a whole and Assam in particular, where stories in long existing trend of media representations, have been projecting and propagating the region in negative light to the rest of the nation and beyond. Thus there is a constant pressure for the journalists working in the region, to focus and highlight on stories of violence and unrest to survive in the highly consumerised and competitive media industry. The mental pressure to thrive negative portrayal is also very high.

A brief survey of producer's intentions in communicating instances of violence in Northeastern part of India, and receiver's perception on the same was carried out. It is observed that shocking open ended information of direct violence images and visuals create uneasiness and insecurity leading to psycho-physiological stress, anxiety and trauma in people. On the other hand the physical work environment in respect to work hours, schedules, field work environment and constant pressure to sell their media for the practicing journalists in the region, content is an area of concern.

In terms of Northeast news reaching out to a widespread media consumers, mainstream media plays a significant role. Mainstream media, national newspapers or news channels mostly based in Delhi with huge spread with viewership/readership throughout the nation and abroad, usually accept certain level or categories of violence, the conventional violence. These forms of violence are mostly found to be in accordance to the popular audience beliefs and media understanding in relation to any particular place, region, events or persons. Certain criteria that work well for any information to be easily accepted and picked by the national mainstream media are these instances of conventional violence.

Apparently news about violence, mostly uncensored information, has become a priority in media communication today, especially in reference to Northeast India as a whole and Assam in particular, where stories in long existing trend of media representations, have been projecting and propagating the region in negative light to the rest of the nation and beyond. Thus there is a constant pressure for the journalists working in the region, to focus and highlight on stories of violence and unrest to survive in the highly consumerised and competitive media industry. This results in media practitioners working under tremendous pressure and being emotionally exploited for a patterned projection of the region through violence. The journalists working in and from the region reporting northeast are in constant look out for negative reports from the region to survive in the industry. It creates occupational cognitive stress.

Excessive violence and selective reporting has lead to propagation of negative image of the region to the media consumers. Varied user groups were enquired about their perception creation and impact of media representations. While the youth were found to be negatively informed about the society leading to mistrust, dissatisfaction and stress; the elderly consumers of media were apparently found to be rendered worried with hopelessness and stress of surviving in dangerous living conditions. This led to think if Northeast in reality provided such horrific living conditions or was most of the negative image created and propagated by media to use sensitive open ended information as profitable commodity; and if such occupation imposes stress on the working media practitioners, the journalists as well as users specifically the elderly section of society.

An exploratory inquiry into the procedure and criteria that goes behind the production of news content representing Northeast; criteria and strategies that media practitioners employ to make relevant judgments regarding information collection, production, projection and presentation formats, was conducted. In-depth personal interviews were held to get first hand information from 112 respondents, from the media fraternity and the consumers of media. These interview transcripts served as the primary sources of data for content analysis. The analysis process was inductive and took a grounded theory approach with the interview transcripts emerging into

categories on their own. A survey of producer's intentions in communicating certain social violence in Northeastern part of India, and receiver's perception creation as per acceptance of the information through representation in media and impact of media violence was carried out, specifically on the elderly and youth section of the consumer groups.

Media persons in the region perform duties under tremendous work load with low returns in terms of salary, other legitimate facilities and safety measures. Also working in conflict situations hunting for violence related stories put much mental pressure to the working journalists, which is also found to be de-motivating for practicing free and fairer means. There is constant pressure for the journalists to focus and highlight on stories of violence and unrest, which are in tune with the popular perception and popular culture of the state and outside, where they mainstream thrives for negative portrayal. The mental pressure to work against their will and to thrive for negative portrayal is also very high. Every individual journalist when confronted regrets the state in which the region is being and has been projected in the media for the people to know it as an unrest and violent place, unliveable. But in practice everyone follows the unsaid practice of following the popular culture reinforcing the prejudices and stereotypes about the region.

News is the window to the society for a specific end user groups and representation in media that are skewed toward violence could encourage people to believe that the world is a hostile place. Some effects that are usually associated only with violent media content are conceivable as well. Viewing news about tragedy is certainly upsetting. This section of end users' of media product develops negative feelings from viewing of unpleasant news items about the region. There arises a need to control imaging and the way Northeast is being represented and portrayed to the world outside the region.

Intended commercial success of media has resulted in TRPs and circulation figures appear more important factors of news identification than content. As representation of violence is apparently found to be huge businesses, there are certain aspects of violence which receive more media attention. The commercialisation of news content

for revenue generation is evident in all spheres of media in selective reporting of violence incidents.

Considering the large and varied audience of the mass media with social, psychological, cultural, regional and age differences; their acceptance, rejections and reactions and effects on them are undoubtedly varied as well. The producers and practicing field journalists also combine into an important mix that are well or even more affected by the process of representation of the region through a patterned projection of violence.

The media coverage of some of the events in the Northeast raises worrying questions about objectivity and responsibility of the media. Before the situation further aggravates, the media in Northeast India must take adequate steps to reduce violence in its content for the general wellbeing of the people. And thus this also raises opportunity of context specific detailed study on the effects of media violence on specified end user groups and also on the producers as well. To get audience attention, it may have positive or negative impact, media many-a-times heavily focuses violence; and this may be seen seriously with its social consequences and ergonomic issues.

Undoubtedly violence dominates the media content, but significantly violent content in media has not only raised quantitatively over the years with media boom, media commercialisation and consumerism in the regional scenario, but also qualitatively with visuals, images and even texts becoming highly disturbing, graphic and detailed. It was unanimously agreed upon by respondents that regional violence has been immensely exaggerated by the media leaving other, genuine issues with little attention. Priority given to violence content in comparison to positive human interest stories or developmental stories, in news rather than other aspects of the region has always been a matter of concern.

News representation falls under the periphery of communication design, and as design is considered to be the process of changing current situation to a preferred one. In this context, it needs to be addressed that how much is today's violence representation in media performing towards the goal of betterment of the society.

# Chapter I

## **Introduction: Theoretical Perspectives on Media, Representation and Violence**

### **1.1 Introduction: Role of Media and Media Studies**

Image identity of a group of people and place depends on the daily life happenings and tradition that makes a specific recognisable culture. These are mostly presented to others through various means or mediums. As media (newspapers, radio, television, internet etc) are major source of information presentation and dispersion, it may be said that media influences the image building of the society it represents. It is assumed that uncensored information or news about violence has become a priority in media communication today, especially in reference to Northeast India as a whole and Assam in particular. Though the active audience participation and ignorance of the media producers could be said to be the reason so far for the present state, understanding the ground reality becomes very important in order to find out the actual scenario and to what extent the damage has already been done to the image of the region projected in media through various, multifaceted representations of violence.

The present study aims to explore the understanding of the representation of violence of media houses of Assam. To understand and analyse that through representations of facts and figures of violence what image of the society is being projected to the audience and what are the overt and covert intentions of the media producers behind the projection, will be an attempt made through this study. The below mentioned may be considered as state of the art status towards looking into the issue.

Media is about messages being formed, sent out, received and interpreted (Kolker 2009: 23) and is responsible for mass communication. Media could be considered as a series of texts and context; where each text is a coherent, related unit of expression (13). It is the channel through which mass communication, the process by which individuals or entities relay information to large segments of the population at the

same time, is carried out. Furthermore, media is an academic discipline and field of study that deals with the content, history and effects of various media alternatives used for mass communication. As a subject it varies greatly in theoretical and methodological focus and thus may be considered as a series of texts and context; where each text is a coherent, related unit of expression (Kolker 22). Contemporary media studies includes the study of media with emphasis on the newspapers, magazines, television, documentaries, radio, internet, video games, mobile devices, and all other forms of mass media.

## **1.2 Representation: Media in General**

Representation refers to the construction in any medium (especially the mass media) of aspects of 'reality' such as people, places, objects, events, cultural identities and other such abstract concepts. These constructions might be in many formats like speech, writing, still images or moving pictures. In the study of representation in media the main concern is in identifying the forms and processes in which representations are made to appear natural or real to the consumers. Through various methods of representation ideologies are framed and perspectives created. Formal analysis of representation revolves mainly around two methods: semiotics or process of representation, and content analysis. The term representation refers to both, the processes involved as well as the products produced. For instance, in relation to the key markers of identity like class, age, gender and ethnicity, representation involves not only how identities are represented within the text but also how they are constructed in the processes of production and reception by people whose identities are also differentially marked in relation to such demographic factors.

### **1.2.1 Representation and Media**

Today's media communication effectiveness is dependent on the representation skills that media uses to its excellence. Simply put representation may be said to be a method of portraying things, a process by which people attempt to comprehend reality. Representation has always been associated with aesthetics as in arts and semiotics in relation to signs. Representation can be defined in three ways; "to look like or resemble to something, to stand in for something or someone, and to present a second time to re-present" (O'Shaughnessy 35/79). As it is believed, it is owing to the

representational capability of man that translates into various forms on paper like signs, symbols, words, ideas, and expressions etc that art exists. Similarly representation also facilitates means of communication, creating newer scopes and enhancing scopes. Representations rely on existing and culturally understood signs and images, which currently both the print and electronic media, and also the new media, use and constantly research upon. In order to find out the most effective mode of representation which is suitable to the context, effective and interactive, representation technique have been developed from time to time and thereby their effects and contemporary practices would provide a tested basis.

Theory of Forms or theory of Ideas is believed to be the beginning of the concept of representation (Ross 1951: 80). This theory referred to the argument of Plato, the Classical Greek philosopher that the material world as visible is not the real world, but it is only an image or copy of the real world (88). Plato considered it universal that forms were abstract representations of the varied things that exist on earth, and that these can only be perceived by reason. Widely believed Plato, possibly for the first time, recognised the existence of two worlds, on the one hand the constantly changing apparent world and, on the other, the unchanging world of forms. Plato and Aristotle have been the key figures who further considered literature as a form of representation, which still serves as the relevant basis of present day understanding of media communication. To deal with the fundamental aspects Aristotle considered representation as natural characteristics of human beings. Therefore claiming, that the only ability that distinguishes humans from other animals is their ability to create and manipulate signs. He actually considered 'mimesis' (Auerbach 2003), a critical and philosophical term with wide range of meanings associated with it, like imitation, representation, mimicry, similarity, resemblance, the act of expression, and the presentation of the self, etc., as natural to man. Mimesis, the Greek word meaning imitation or representation, was initially theorised by Plato and Aristotle and was later supported by philosophers of varied times like Philip Sidney, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Sigmund Freud, Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno, Erich Auerbach, Luce Irigaray, René Girard, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Michael Taussig, Merlin Donald, Paul Ricoeur, etc.

The only characteristic that distinguishes man from other animals is his possession of the instinct ability for representation. Even the origin of the word 'human' is associated with this character of man. The word 'human' is derived from the term 'homo symbolicum' which means representational animal. Humans are imitative and learn only by representing things. Representation again may be categorised in two sub-categories- semiotics and aesthetics, as proposed by Mitchell. Where semiotics is the theory of signs, aesthetics is the theory of arts. And again these signs are manipulated in order to communicate the intended meaning and to portray things. Similarly Aristotle discusses representation in three different ways: object, manner and means (Lentricchia and McLaughlin 13). Object, the symbol which is being represented, manner in which the symbol is represented or means is the object which is used to represent the symbol. According to Aristotle, there is no access to reality. But the understanding of reality depends upon the representations of reality; there may be various forms of representation like texts, images, videos, various discourses etc. As reality is complicated and extensive, it is not possible to capture reality completely. Therefore the representations though similar to reality are not reality.

Understanding of reality to man has been only through various modes of representation. Language which is supposed to be one of the primary modes of representation has been proved to be inadequate to communicate the intended, as language in itself is an inadequate mode of representation; thus to represent or to capture reality newer modes of representation have always been explored. Aristotle considered representations necessary for human existence, as representation becomes man's way of being in the world and his method of learning. Whereas Aristotle viewed representation as a medium or channel through which man gets to 'the real' on the contrary, Plato believed that representations create worlds of illusion leading one away from the 'real things' (Hall 1997: 87). Though Plato considered literature as a representation of life, he also believed that representation needs to be controlled and monitored. He believed that representation i.e. creation of illusion, poses a serious threat to society as it can encourage harmful emotions and also can encourage the imitation of evil. For Plato, representation, like contemporary media, intervenes between the viewer and the real, creating illusions that lead one away from real things.

Developing further on these concepts scholars have also arrived at an understanding of the political and ideological issues and the influences of representations. It is from this understanding of representation in the words of Plato that today representation has evolved as an important study area, inseparable from the study of society and culture and even media (Mitchell 1995: 3). It is further argued that since gap between the intended and the realised always exists, representation can never be complete or accurate. Thus Plato's terming representation a rather negative concept (Fourie 2010: 205) seems acceptable. Moreover as widely accepted interpretations also play an active role in determining representation. Individual and public perceptions play equally significant role as well in perception creation of certain representations. Viewing representation in this context also focuses on how meanings are created, manipulated and circulated to convey certain messages within specific discourses. Semioticians (Peirce, Saussure) generally agree upon representational relationships of three kinds, namely icon, symbol and index (Lentricchia and McLaughlin 14). Representation can also be seen to be the process in which meanings are constructed using various elements of the society or culture to depict reality.

There are various approaches to study representation. The Thematic approach deals with identity, stereotyping, prejudice or bias which include class, age, gender, ethnicity, royalty, motherhood, childhood, nationhood etc. Another approach to representation is the Generic approach which deals with representation of broader general aspects like gender, class etc in texts. And the third approach is media-specific approach which deals with representations in media forms in all formats and shapes like newspapers, magazines film, televisions, internet etc.

### **Representation and Perception**

Jacques Lacan reconstitutes representation around perception. As he was deeply influenced by, Saussure, Lévi Strauss, and Jakobson, one can find the structuralist view throughout his work; Lacan distinguishes between the reality and the real, and focused on the fundamental detachment of language from reality. He moreover emphasises on the complex and multilayered idea of truth or the text. Lacan also considered human beings a group of signifiers grouped around a proper name. Post-structuralists, like Barthes and Foucault have their own distinct views on

representation. In his essay 'From Work to Text' *from Image—Music—Text* (1977), Barthes argues that the relation of writer, reader and observer is changed by movement from work to text. In this light, we can observe Barthes's propositions of the differences between work and text in terms of method, genres, signs, plurality, filiations, reading, and pleasure (156). After Barthes, Foucault is seen emphasising more on 'discourse' rather than 'language'. He studied not language, but discourse as a system of representation.

According to Foucault, discourse defines and produces the objects of knowledge. It also influences how ideas are executed and used to regulate the conduct of others. So the meaning is constructed through discourse, nothing has any meaning outside of discourse. Regarding representation he was more concerned with the production of knowledge and meaning through discourse. He was deeply critical of the traditional conception of the subject which stated the authentic source of action and meanings. His most radical propositions are that the subject is product of the discourse. That is, the subject cannot be placed or seen outside the discourse. The subject is subjected to any particular discourse or many discourses at the same time, and thus also exists within the knowledge, the discursive formation of a particular period, culture or society. And moreover, individuals may differ in respect to their gender, social class, racial characteristics, etc. and meaning is only generated in accordance to those positions constructed by the discourse, subjecting themselves to its rules and understandings. And thus the individuals become subjects of the power and knowledge of the discourses.

The main point here is the way discourse, representation, knowledge and truth are historicised by Foucault, in contrast to the tendency in semiotics. Put in simpler words, things meant something and were true only when placed or scrutinized under certain context. Foucault thought that in each period, discourse differed from period to period, with no necessary continuity between them, i.e. representation, understanding and perception creation depend a lot on discourses and that these discourses in turn are also not stable. The structuralist language of signs and codes, along with the poststructuralist notion of discourses and texts, emphasises on how power is implicated in all forms of cultural representation. (Barker 2008: 21)

Charles Sanders Peirce, logician, mathematician, and scientist, founded the concept of philosophical pragmatism. His central ideas are centered on logic and representation. Peirce's theory of signs is a theory of reasoning and cognition. Representations of objects function as signs and this he defines as 'semiosis'. It is also the process of cooperation between signs, their objects, and their mental representations. The study of signs is 'Semiotics', which examines the grounds necessary for representations to function as signs. Ferdinand de Saussure, a Swiss linguist, played a major role in the development of semiotics. The study of semiotics examines the signs and types of representation that humans use to express feelings, ideas, thoughts and ideologies (Ryder). He suggests that the meaning of a sign is arbitrary, in effect; there is no link between the signifier and the signified. Thus with Saussurian studies, representation has evolved into an extremely considerable component of language, and most importantly and most conventionally has been included into communication studies.

### **1.2.2 Communication: Propagation of life**

Derrida believed that there is no original meaning circulating outside of 'representation', so that writing is in at the 'origins' of meaning. According to him there is no primary source of signification and no self-present transparent meaning that can fix and execute the relation between signifiers and signifieds. Thus, 'From the moment that there is meaning there is nothing but signs. We think only in signs' (Derrida 50). It is in this sense that there is nothing outside of texts or nothing but only texts exist, but by this is not meant that any external material world does not exist. (Barker 2002: 30). Along with Derrida, Wittgenstein, Rorty among others also believe that, the 'real' is always already a representation. But rather than only concentrating on representational adequacy, we need to be more concerned with politics of representation as well. Here marginality or subordination can be understood as a constitutive effect of representation realized or resisted by living persons. It is also a matter of concern that how representations signify in the context of social power and with what consequences (Barker and GalasinÅski 18-19).

Later Stuart Hall took up the politics of representation in his seminal text entitled *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (1997). In his views, representation is the medium through which meaning was generated. For Hall,

objects, people etc., do not possess any true meanings, rather the meanings are generated by individuals or groups (Hall 1997: 155). Representation in this sense is the generation of meanings through combined work of language and systems of knowledge production. Representation becomes the process or channel or medium through which these meanings are both created and reified. Hall introduces the poststructuralist approach of representation by looking at representation as something larger than any one single whole. The currently ascendant strand of cultural studies, as said by Hall holds the field to be centrally concerned with culture as the signifying practices of representation (Barker and GalasinÅski 4).

A similar perspective on representation as part of a larger field is argued for by William J. Thomas Mitchell. In the introduction of his work *Picture Theory* (1994), he uses the term representation to examine and define the whole field of representations and representational activity. According to Mitchell "representation is an extremely elastic notion, which extends all the way from a stone representing a man to a novel representing the day in the life of several Dubliners." He also recommends a shift from the then perspective of representations as merely representing objects and encourages focus on the relationships and process, through which representations are produced, valued, viewed and exchanged (Mitchell 420). Mitchell was the first one to negate the understanding and studying of individual mediums, but emphasised on the concept of considering media as a whole, along with its relationships and processes through which media products are produced, valued, and exchanged. He argues that representation has been an important factor in the assessment of culture, linkage between political, semiotic/ aesthetic, and even economic notions of "standing or acting for"; and thus is part of a larger whole (6). Representation may be in memory or in verbal descriptions or in images, it does not only mediate the knowledge for consumption, it also affects that knowledge through fragmenting, negating, reinforcing etc (420).

### **Media application**

The concept of representation embodies a range of meanings and usages in various discourses like mathematical, scientific, political, legal and others, and is also relevant to media as media texts and media representation of society. Pramod K. Nayar, in his

book *Packaging Life* (2009) clearly states that “everyday life is informed through and through by modes of representation in the mass media that ‘sell’ us products, services, ideas and opinions about thin bodies, luxurious villas, social justice, global warming and inspire, scare or ask us to *manage* bodies, finances, leisure, families, mind, emotions, in short, the components of our everyday experiences” (191).

Representation has always played a central role in understanding literature, aesthetics, semiotics and other works of art. The concept of representation also embodies a range of meanings and usages in various discourses like mathematical, scientific, political, legal and others. And representation is also relevant to media as media texts, to media representation of society. Pramod K. Nayar, in his book *Packaging Life* (2009) clearly states that “everyday life is informed through and through by modes of representation in the mass media that ‘sell’ us products, services, ideas and opinions about thin bodies, luxurious villas, social justice, global warming and inspire, scare or ask us to *manage* bodies, finances, leisure, families, mind, emotions, in short, the components of our everyday experiences” (191).

In media, representation may be studied in two varied forms; one in which there is direct representation of the real, and the other is use of certain means and methods as substitute for a particular element to be represented. Understanding representation as re-presentation of an image, likeness, or reproduction states that representation functions through its ability to resemble something else. Representation also refers to the constructions of aspects of reality in any medium. Especially in the mass media, it deals with construction of certain aspects of reality such as people, places, objects, events, cultural identities and other similar concepts; which may be in speech, writing, still or moving images. Nalin Mehta in his book *India on Television* (2008) states that television captures and publicises reality, or ‘what looks like reality’, in some circumstances television can create reality, which Mehta calls edited version of reality with consequences (110). Same is the attempt of most media texts, to resemble the real.

Talking about the Latin word “simulacrum”, meaning “likeness” or “similarity”, which is used to describe representation, Jean Baudrillard offers a media example of it

in the title of his radical essay 'The Gulf War did not take Place' (1991). The Gulf War was the first war to be televised live. Known as the *Operation Desert Storm*, the war was followed by millions of viewers across the globe that had access to America-based international television channel CNN (Cable News Network), making this a defining moment in the history of representation (Fourie 2010: 221). From Baudrillard's theories of media representation as a simulacrum, till date mass media representations of real life events have changed considerably.

In media studies, the term which refers to the processes involved in the constructions but also refers to its products. And thus it can also be said that representation addresses identity - class, gender, age, ethnicity, etc; how identities are represented or constructed within the text and how they are constructed in the processes of production and reception by people whose identities are also differentially marked in relation to certain demographic factors. While talking of 'Language, Identity and Cultural Politics', Barker and GalasinÅski state that "The popular cultural repertoire of the western world holds that we have a true-self, an identity which we possess and which can become known to us. Identity is understood as universal and timeless core, an essence of the self that is expressed as representations which are in turn recognised by us and also others. That is, identity is an essence signified through signs of taste, beliefs, attitudes, lifestyles etc" (Barker and GalasinÅski 28).

It can be summed up that the selective character of representation undoubtedly leads to the view that discourse and other semiotic practices result in formation of ideologies, their reproductions and reinforcements (Barker and GalasinÅski, 2001). The term ideology here can be understood as social representations, which can be either general or abstract understanding of the term, shared by members of a group and used by them to accomplish everyday social practices: acting and communicating (Billig et al., 1988; Fowler, 1985; van Dijk, 1998). These representations are organised into systems which are deployed by social classes and other groups `in order to make sense of, figure out and render intelligible the way society works' (Hall 1997: 26).

### **Socio-personal Relation base: Role of Culture Tradition**

Any incident happening in any place is either captured and later transmitted to the masses or captured and transmitted to the masses immediately. What the audience sees is the copy of the original. This is mainly in case of news events. And in other cases like the films, television programmes or radio and internet contents the media products are imitation of the real society. And it is only because of its ability to be copied or reproduced, the representation becomes more accessible to be communicated on a mass level. In similar tones, Hall's work on the media has focused on productions and representations. Hall suggests that we can try 'to theorise identity as constituted, not outside but within representation; and hence of cinema (or other media), not as a second-order mirror held up to reflect what already exists, but as that form of representation which is able to constitute us as new kinds of subjects, and thereby enable us to discover places from which to speak' (Hall 1997: 58). This provides a clear rationale for studying media representations (Gauntlett 31). These along with responses from actual audiences can make an interesting area of work on effective communication.

Communication does not limit itself to representational effects, rather it also encompasses all that language does to constitute and express social and personal relations (Barker and GalasinÂski 75). In context to media, each media text or media content, be it television, print, radio or internet, can be seen as a representation of the society around it. Each media text is a representation working through specific media constructing larger media networks, depicting a larger society in media. It can also be said that the main characteristic of media is its ability to reproduce or represent.

### **1.2.3 Media a Commodity-product**

Representation of a specific object also introduced us to a set of political problems, certain questions like the privileging of the original or authentic presentation over the mediating re-presentation or reproduction. The real being represented actually leads to larger discussions in and around the representation. A certain representation of an event or happening, when put as a media product, opens up larger frontiers of related topics and understandings. Here representation is seen as some facts being represented using certain other means or methods. For example a film like *3 Idiots* (2009) not

only is a representation of the particular characters and incidents, it also throws light on the larger scenario of the society, the education system, the students' condition etc. Representation of a specific object also introduced us to a set of political problems, certain questions like the privileging of the original or authentic presentation over the mediating re-presentation or reproduction. The real being represented actually leads to larger discussions in and around the representation.

Tomlinson argues, the media is the dominant representational aspect of modern culture but its meanings are mediated by the 'lived experience' of everyday culture (Barker and GalasinÅski 8). Similarly, in *Packaging Life* (2009), Nayar emphasises on the construction of conceptual frameworks (within representations) that influence the way we think, believe and see the world whether in the domain of health, risk, comfort or mobility demands an 'unpacking' that exposes the regulatory grid and cultural politics of these representations (192). He also emphasises the task of this 'unpacking', which he argues is to see how such representations codify particular practices of discrimination, support, emancipation or oppression as natural and legitimize power relations among groups and between individuals (194).

### **Role of Media Ethics in Information Re-presentation**

Media, in all its forms, undoubtedly is a mirror of the society. It is media that connects us to the rest of the world or society as a whole and similarly connects back the world to us. Our knowledge about the society and the way others perceive us can be said to be more or less the effect of the image created by the media.

Media representation can create certain images and confirm, reconfirm or reject the already created perceptions. Thus it creates tremendous potential impact on the way a society conducts itself in the present, as well as the shape it would take in the future. So, when media representation becomes so important and an integral part of society and its functioning, what is being represented, in what way, why and how also becomes equally important. And here comes in the concept of ethics in representation that leads to perception creation. It is rightly said that "an unfettered press without ethical concerns can be a threat to a free society and to its very independence" (Rao).

In present day context, regarding professional ethics and propriety, in information communication and representation of facts and society, many including media makers, social watchdogs and also academicians are expressing serious concern regarding media: media content and freedom, authenticity and responsibility in representation. The question is also raised “the bigger and more sensational the media has become, the less faith the public have in what they have to say” (Datt 2010). Thus means, methods and feasibility to achieve that trustworthiness in representation is a constant search in and outside the media world, academics as well as practitioners.

Effective communication intended for the masses or for a specific target group, regarding a situation or a particular theme, results in inspiring wellbeing or in imposing negativism. With power comes great responsibility. Undoubtedly media possesses immense power to shape our world (Boyle: 2005; Schwartz: 1983 etc). But does it dispose enough responsibility to handle serious social issues to take human emotion further to social development without hurting sentiments and not enraging people; thus it becomes important to study the effectiveness and appropriateness in the representations in media so that they encourage positive image building.

Irrefutably it may be argued that the present media scenario in India, in practice and production is to grab easy attention and in the process what happens is rampant sensationalisation of selective information. To information there is no value addition instead there is manipulation to it and further there is breaking of the information and according to the wants of the controlling bodies the information is either partially hidden or partially exposed and ofcourse with certain political or apolitical intentions.

#### **1.2.4 Conceptualising Violence: Representation in Media**

##### **Defining Violence**

Violence is the expression of physical force against one or more people, compelling action against one's will on pain of being hurt. Violence is used as a tool of manipulation. And it has also become an area of concern for law and culture which take attempts to suppress and stop it. The word violence covers a broad spectrum which varies from a physical altercation between two individual beings, to war and genocide which affects a larger section of people. However, violence has been defined

in a broader sense to include behaviour by people or against people liable to cause physical or psychological harm (Gulbenkian Foundation 1995).

### **Representation of Violence in Media**

It is believed by critics of media that it is the manner of representation which affects the consumer of the media product more than the actual event. Media matter because they shape and reflect our understanding of the world, gender relations, violence crime and justice (Boyle 21). Violence can be unnecessary and overemphasised in media, with the effects of cultivation or desensitisation. And most of the times various technical codes such as music, sound effects, camera angles, motions, realism, etc are used to serve the purpose of highlighting the violence or over-emphasising it or for adding extra detailing to facts, and attracting people. These make the representation of violence more powerful and people are easily affected by them and even the impact of such violent representations in media is strong on people and society.

#### **1.2.5 Realism, Violence and Media**

Representation of violence in media can be criticised for being represented unrealistically and also for being too realistic represented at times. There have been attempts to infiltrate a sense of reality into the audiences through means and methods of representation. Media representations of violence do not only reflect real life, but also shape the way we understand and make sense of violence in the context of our own lives (Boyle 13).

#### **Regulations**

Violence in media has been an issue of concern and matter of debate for long now. There are deliberations if authorities should impose restrictions on media content and representation of violence to prevent media consumers to be adversely affected by the exposure. If at all restrictions are to be put in what level and on what categories of violence should be exempted from being represented and in what manner. One hand while there are serious thoughts and actions going on for imposing regulations before releasing media products to the consumers and censorship is seen as a probable solution for severe cases, on the another argument put fore against imposing regulations on the conduct of media is regulations being barrier to the fundamental

right to freedom of expression, which hold true for the media as well. Media practitioners and experts thus are seen opposing stricter regulation laws but encouraging self discipline, ethical practices at individual and organisational level.

There are various rules and regulations laid down by various concerned authorities regarding what and how much can be represented through media content. Many media producers', broadcasters and media houses have agreed upon voluntary codes governing what aspects of violence may or may not be depicted through their content. Media in most of its formats like print or electronic media have sets of standards, rules and ethics when it comes to the reporting of facts, including violence. To what extent they are adhered to, is another matter of concern but there actually are governing bodies and set of media regulations that are not supposed to be violated by any media.

### **Media Violence and Active Audiences**

The affected viewers are mostly conceptualised as passive, uncritically accepting what they see on screen, barely media-literate (Boyle 11). Media images do not produce similar, predictable results upon those who consume them. In the process of consuming media products consumers of media products are actively involved in determining meaning of the messages conveyed through media (Jenkins). On one hand where the audience is empowered to decipher any media text depending on various personal as well as social factors, on the other it is equally important to consider the authority and role of producers to communicate the intended message to the proposed target by deliberately placing/slotting it in order to reach the masses and influence consumption and acceptance of the media text.

### **Media Violence: A Discourse**

The discourse on media violence even after much indulgence by scholars of various fields remains riven with inconsistency. While some scholars assert that violence in media and violence in the society are directly related, some feel it affects individuals distinctively depending upon various factors, there are also studies which suggest that violence in media is not at all responsible for violence outside media and that media violence is not universally promoting violence. This discrepancy in the outcome of

the media effect studies relating to violent representations and violence can be said to be due to difficulties in consistently defining the term and concept of media and violence (Trend 3). The direct relation between media violence and real-life aggression is yet to be established clearly, but impact of violence in media on society cannot be ruled out. Social science has gotten itself into something of a scrape in the matter of television, especially in the area of violence; none of the various aspects of the argument about violence permits social science to depart the field (Taller).

Social scientists have concluded that there is a weak association between watching media violence and real life aggression. Organisations like the Canadian Pediatric Society and the American Medical Association have even declared media violence to be public health issue. One among many experts who relate real life violence directly to its representation in media is comic-book creator Gerard Jones, who contends that violent video games, movies, music and comic books enable people to pull themselves out of emotional traps.

However, there is a section which maintains that media violence if restricted would seriously hamper artistic expression. Researchers have argued that media violence is qualitatively different from real violence and is natural signifier of conflict (Hodge and Tripp 217). 'Mean world syndrome' a phenomenon coined by communication specialist and media critic George Gerbner, states that violence-related content of media persuades media consumers to believe that the world is far more a dangerous place to live in than it actually is. Numerous scientific researches provide evidence affirming that exposure to media violence harms society (Trend 8). Another study, the 1930s behaviourism models, the Payne Fund Studies, concluded that the mass media considerably influences consumer's behaviours.

After 2001, a group of media scholars which included notable intellectuals as Jib Fowles, Henry Jenkins, Vivian Sobchack and Richard Rhodes; influenced a research subculture which stressed more on identifying positive aspects of media and game culture concentrating on media violence and its effects on the consumers. Though media violence can be undoubtedly declared unsafe for the society but the outcome of it on the society may not always be the predictable ones, because of the extremely

individualistic ways of people to accept media products and be affected by media; either “enjoy, transform, reject, ignore, remember or forget the messages they receive” (Trend 39). Symonds demonstrates that the debate on the effects of violence cannot be conducted without recognizing the vast generic and textual variety that characterises the representation of violence in contemporary media. He used empirical audience reception data and discussions of different representations of violence, to look at violence in the media as an art form in itself (Symonds 17,151,157).

### **1.2.6 Media Violence: Examining History**

If media violence can be said to be violence put forth for the audience to experience and accept, similar form of consumption of violence is seen associated with the French Revolution, the guillotine. It can be cited as the epitome visual culture of violence (Graybill). The only different of the guillotine and today’s media violence is while the former enabled direct witnessing of the act, the later enables direct visualisation and conceptualisation of violence through media representations and reinforced perception of violence.

#### **Action Sells: Film and Television**

Representation of violence has always been assumed to promote deviant behaviour. And this is not confined to the understanding of media in today’s context, like newspapers, films, television and internet but even before that. Victorian street theatre and Penney novels were considered to encourage misbehaviour among the working poor class, especially men in urban areas (Trend 3). Violence was always the focus of early movies. Thomas Edison’s film *The Execution of Mary, Queen of Scots* (1895) was a 30 second clip of a beheading. Then followed films like *The Corbett-Fitzsimmins Fight* (1897), Sigmund Lubin’s *Chinese Massacring Christians* (1900), Georges Méliès’s *The Last Days of Anne Boleyn* (1905) and the trend went on. *The Corbett-Fitzsimmins Fight* was one of the first films to evoke the ire of anti-media violence critics that even lead to a ban on prize fighting movies in 1912 (15). At present there has been a constant escalation in volume and intensity of representation of violence in media. This raises concern as the escalation continues at a time when the general level of public sphere has also been rising (8).

Today's commercial media are truly global, influenced by deregulation of media ownership, privatisation of television, and new communications technologies that have created media giants owned by transnational corporations (Kamalipour and Rampal 17). And as researches over time have found violent images has the capacity to attract and hold on to audiences. Thus a major amount of films and television is seen consisting of violence content.

### **1.2.7 News and Violence**

Television news has changed the commodity nature of news. Competition for audience is fierce, sensational news- storms, crashes, murders, etc become fodder for television, with each network packaging the information for maximum exposure, maximum sponsorship and maximum income (Kolker 22). Reports involving incidents of violence appear daily in various modes of media, newspapers, internet, radio, television etc. We even find graphic details of violence in most horrific ways (Fourie 2010: 415). In order to talk about crime as news, news and justification of reporting crimes begins discussion on news making (Parsons). The public has the right to know about crimes or criminals in their country, crime reporting thus functions to provide the public with knowledge and also information to protect them (Chermak 81). The crime-as-deviance theorists claim that crime coverage creates a media-fed moral panic (Meyers 23). Moreover the intersecting of the assumptions, stereotypes, and social notions embedded with cultural understandings of gender, race, class, age, and other signifiers of inequality delimits how a particular incident of violence is portrayed within the media text, or news (32).

Violence is also entertaining as it attracts attention of the audiences (Surette). All this justifies the role of media in representing violence on various media texts be it print, television, films, internet or any other format, as these imply that violence is presented as a service to the public (Parsons). Media (especially television and newspapers) brings violence happening in various parts of the world into the living rooms of viewers. And these images of violence are interpreted differently by different audiences. And in the meantime there are external forces as well, like political parties who use these images to mediate their own meanings to the masses (Mehta 2006).

### **1.2.8 Impact of Media Violence on Consumers**

Issues surrounding media violence arise not only from what is being represented but how it is represented. And as media cannot represent any incident in full, as it has exactly happened, media represents structured views in interpretations of reality. Media representation can thus have positive or negative effect on media users. This might also facilitate copycat behaviour or desensitisation to violence (Fourier 2010: 415). A violent or hostile act on television or an elaborate explanation of procedure on print also does encourage copycat crimes, which are undoubtedly acts of violence inspired by media violence or exposure (Cefrey 60). Evidences suggest that repeated viewing desensitises consumers to screen violence, and further desensitise to violence in real life and further leads media consumers to themselves become violent (Boyle 11). Nalin Mehta points out the copycat consequences of television were at play during the 2002 Gujarat riots, where telecasting violence encouraged others to turn violent. He points out three factors which could have lead to a certain kind of riot coverage, basically plain reporting of facts. Inexperienced journalists, inexperience of the television channels with no rule of *LIVE* coverage and diminished role played by the editors (Mehta 2008).

It is seen that media also plays a role in the intensification and escalation of violence in society. Some important issues that need to be addressed in this concern of representation of violence in media are perspectives on violence as reported in the media, violence in news and entertainment, complexities of the variables that play a role in studying media violence and ways to curb any potential harmful effects of media violence (Fourie 2010: 433).

#### **Media and Society**

In media studies, Gramsci's concept of hegemony is useful in showing how through images and texts the consent to a dominant ideological position is won (Lacey 113). Elaborating on the impact of media, the agenda-setting model on public opinion was put forth by Bernard Cohen. This theory asserts the important role for media in creating public opinion. The Frankfurt School put forth the line of inquiry and social theorising on the mass media which pointed at the dominant ideology of the ruling class (the media producers here) and saw media contents as instruments of hegemony

of the dominating classes. 'Culture industries', a term coined by Adorno and Horkheimer refer to the systematic way in which the ruling classes utilises mass media to reproduce their hegemonic position in society. Louis Althusser too maintained the ideological functions of media in modern capitalist society. Stuart Hall emphasised upon the structure of dominance in modern society and the role of media. While some theories regarding media and society try to show direct cause-effect relationship between the two there are some which deny direct impact. The Mainline communication theory, insists on the active role played by the recipients of media texts in processing and interpreting the messages received through media (Semati 59).

### **1.2.9 Media Violence: Ever growing concern**

Krishna Kumar, a noted educationist confirms that cinema and television have made substantial contribution to the creation of unkind, volatile ethos. Kumar calls this the 'cult of violence' (Mishra 2005). Research in the field of media and representation of violence tries to establish links between consumption of media violence and subsequent effects on media consumers including perception creation and behaviour changes. Many experts also believe that violence in the media is also addictive. It is difficult to set down in a definitive way what effect media violence has on consumers. There are a number of reasons for this, but the main issue is that terms like "violence", "conflict" and "aggression" are not easily defined or categorised. As life now has heavily become media information centric and media being the sole source of information among various distant consumer groups, media representations are instrumental in creating the reality perception about the people, place and society. In representing instances of violence often media is even criticised of influencing negative impact on its consumers. Moreover inappropriate representation can cause more harm to the consumers and the society being represented than serve. Thus it becomes essential to look into possible ways to overcome the inappropriate representation of violence in media.

### **Media Effects Theories**

Contemporary theories of representation stress the construction of particular realities, focus on 'bias', 'prejudice' or 'stereotypes' risk implying that there is a single unchanging 'true' reality. Racial Representations also include key themes like exotic,

dangerous, humorous, pitied, etc. it needs to be understood what key themes are there in relation to class, age and gender. The research looking at the theoretical mechanisms that link consuming media violence and aggression has resulted in a handful of processes that some scholars suggest may explain any relationship that may exist. Although vocal support for these theories remains in some quarters, particularly among social psychologists, critics have contended that rhetorical support for these theories has generally outstripped largely absent data (Freedman, Guantlett, Savage etc).

The first hypothesis, in the above mentioned area includes Bandura's (1986, 1994) social learning theory, which was observed in Bandura's famous Bobo Doll experiments. This theory projects that media characters serve as models for aggressive behaviour, and depending upon how the model character is treated, whether rewarded or punished, the viewer or the audience either inhibits or rejects imitation of that behaviour. The second theory is priming, an idea formulated by Jo and Berkowitz in 1967, which was then later revised in 1994. The revised formulation of this theory focused on the belief that media violence might prime thoughts of aggressive behaviour and, consequently, make actual aggressive behaviour more likely. But the priming hypothesis has received very weak and inconsistent support by research in the context of media violence (Freedman 68).

Another theory is Zillman's theory of excitation. The theory advances the belief that the media consumer's behaviour depends a lot on the properties of media violence to which he is exposed to. It suggests that the arousal-inducing properties of media violence are significant for understanding the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of emotional reactions that occur immediately after exposure. Idea of desensitisation is another advocated explaining the link between media violence and aggression. According to this belief, constant exposure to media violence results in a psychological saturation or emotional alteration. Research does seem to suggest exposure to media violence may desensitize viewers to media violence itself. However adequate evidences are lacking to confirm this media violence transfer to real-world violence (Savage 51). Physiological activation is another media effect theory, which suggests that when children watch TV violence, the neurophysiology of

a "phylogenetically-old brain system" is mobilised along with activation of limbic and neo-cortical systems that prepare the organism for motor plans associated with the fight-or-flight response. The authors, Murray et al (2006), of this theory suggest that responses to media violence may be preconscious and have long-term implications that extend beyond the period of exposure.

Many have argued evidences supporting these theories have been comparatively very poor. Thus debate on the merits of these theories is likely to continue and gradually newer theories will be developed in the process. One alternate theory the Catalyst Model (Ferguson et al. 2008) has been proposed to explain the etiology of violence. According to the Catalyst Model, violence arises from a combination of genetic and early social influences, which are family and peers in particular. But media violence is rather considered too weak an influence. Stressful environment circumstances accelerate or influence specific violent acts. This theory is directly at odds with most learning-focused media violence researchers as the Catalyst Model specifically deemphasises media violence. Another theory, expound largely by David Gauntlett is the Moral Panic theory, which suggests that concerns about new media are historical and recurring. Society forms a predetermined negative belief about a new media which is typically not used earlier due to various reasons. Research studies and statements by scholars and politicians are designed to confirm the pre-existing belief, rather than objectively study the issue. Most of the time it is seen that the panic subsides after several years or even decades, but eventually resurfaces when yet another media content with variation or a new form of media is introduced.

### **Expression of Violence through Media**

Media has the capacity to change attitudes, opinions, and behaviours, but to what extent. Empirical research, surveys and experimental methods have proved over time that media-audience relationship is complex and a mediated one rather than simple and direct. Effects can be determined only when primary groups, opinion leaders and other factors intervening between the media and audience were taken into account. Hence comes into scene the 'two step' or 'multiple-step' flow of information (Morley and Brunson 125). Other than the media and the audience, the intermediating factors are also equally significant in determining the effect of media.

In numerous studies the role of media is found to be more limited and implicit and benign in society with emphasis shifting to active audiences, from 'what the media do to the people' to 'what people do to the media'. Overcoming the impression of media being the 'ominous persuasive and other anti-social power' media was found to be just reinforcing prior dispositions and not changing them, not cultivating escapism or passivity but a medium capable of satisfying multiple uses and gratification, not instrument of a levelling of culture but of its democratisation (Morley and Brunson 125). Uses and gratification theory states that the media products are designed in a way for the intended users, keeping in mind their needs and aspirations. Thus the media producers concentrate on market audience research programmes to design media texts. And this often results in homogeneity of products with no media wanting to loose on its consumer base. Fights, shootouts, brutality, car crashes and sadistic violence are common gimmicks designed to capture and hold viewers' attention (Kamalipour and Rampal 153). And moreover economic competition for viewers leads to more and more depictions of violence in media (Prince 237). Thus it can be stated that the increase in violence in media in a way may be linked to its growing acceptance and popularity among the masses.

Representation of violence in media and its effect on individual as well as the whole society is a serious concern. All communicators, media content producers thus need to analyse and understand the consequences before putting forward any content to public. Means and methods are to be thoroughly studied in context specific environment. In fact, the television (media) industry has claimed that media is violent because it is mirror of society (Kamalipour and Rampal 153).

### **News and Media**

While film, television and games provide fictional accounts of violence, disaster and terror; the news media serves the purpose of only representing real life violence, clashes, murder, rapes, killings, abductions, fire, etc violence in all form and intensity, mainly for demonstration. Media moreover are more oriented towards sensationalising stories rather than educating or informing the audiences. As Darrel Pink, a lawyer in Halifax states "if there is no blood, no guts, no sex, the media does not cover it" (McCormick 78). News in particular has the status of being 'purveyor of

truth' (Boyle 2005: 61), resulting in most news representations, being broadly accepted by the media consumers- readers and viewers. But referring to the media coverage of War in Iraq in news and its representation as a 'war spectacle', Danny Schechter (2003a) makes the disturbing indictment of media to have become 'purveyor of infotainment'- a mix of entertainment with serious information prototype. This holds true for almost all media productions in today's context, media work only in an attempt to enhance popularity, attract consumers and increasing revenue generation, and accordingly designs context and context. Something that has become more evident in today's media is tabloidization of mainstream media (Fox and Van Sickle, 2001: 55). And it has widely come to be believed that most people look to news for their information on crime and criminal behaviour, media arguably hold a level of power in the designation of crime and deviance (Ricson et al. 1987; Surette, 1992 and Schissel, 1997).

### **1.2.10 Conflict Reporting and Peace Journalism**

Usually in conflict reporting what gets projected through media is only the conflict and attempts at resolution, politically or mass movement etc. People on the other end get to know only of the conflict and its results in terms of damage, deaths, disruption of daily life and fear. Afghanistan, Pak-Afghan border, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, or conflicts in parts of India many Asian countries have been areas of conflict in the last few decades, where conflict reporting was by and large practiced. In conflict reporting media producers, journalists especially have the perception that the role of media is just to report events, and never play a part in resolving conflicts. Contrary to this school of thoughts is another school of thinkers who look beyond fact representation and believe media coverage of the background and causes of conflict can lead to rapid resolution and normalcy in the affected conflict areas. From this emerged the concept of peace journalism, which is seen as an alternative to war reporting. It may be said that with studies arguing the setbacks of typical practices in conflict reporting, the concept of peace journalism came into being. The concept of peace journalism emerged in the 1970s, and was first suggested by Johan Galtung, a Norwegian sociologist and a pioneer in peace and conflict studies. This tries to overcome the traditional journalistic value of objectivity looks at conflict resolution to be a major function of media. Whereas war journalism is violence-oriented, propaganda-oriented,

elite-oriented and victory-oriented; on the other hand peace journalism provides a broader perspective of reporting on conflict. Peace journalism proposes media should tell the complete story about conflict truthfully with more informed discussion of significant issues like causes and resolution of the conflict (Lynch and Galtung 2010).

Kirsten Schwartz Sparre, points to another aspect of conflict journalism, the norm of social responsibility, which was laid down on the British media in the aftermath of the Second World War. This is to provide to the masses with accurate up-to-date information with explanation and comments and with clear separation of fact from comment (1998). Sparre believes that a real possibility of media lies in the social contract between the media and society. Media should ensure that their impact is positive while keeping the spirit of the social responsibility theory. Denis McQuail in his book *Media Accountability and Freedom of Publication* (2003) furthers the concept of media accountability. Talking of media in conflict situation, McQuail suggests that media has two fold functions- firstly media content and format can be crucial for transforming the conflict into sustainable peace and secondly, a balance between media freedom and social responsibility can effect post-conflict situations as well (181).

### **1.2.11 Reach and Growth of Media Industry in India**

Media and Entertainment industry can be said to be one of the most flourishing sectors in India which has grown immensely in last few decades. And moreover the media industry, mainly after liberalisation of the media sector, is a developing sector with developmental works, and newer methods applications and of technologies. This has raised business opportunities in Indian media and entertainment industry enormously, leading to extended scopes and areas of study in the field.

#### **Media and Entertainment Industry in India**

Today's definition of media encompasses various forms of media such as audio media-radio; audio-visual media like television, films, documentaries; etc internet with blogs, forums, e-papers; mails, telephony and other interactive media; including initial print media including books, papers, magazines, etc. The media in all its forms and format serves the purposes of providing information, entertainment, and

education, to advocacy among others. There are serious factors that need to be studied in context specific areas regarding today's mass media. Though the power of the media can never be ruled out, there are rules and ethics to be abided by. As audience form the most important factor of the whole media industry, the audience or the media consumers are also bestowed with certain amount of power, power to accept or reject the media content. Thus the audience perspective is also a very important field of study for the industry as well as academicians.

### **1.2.12 Media Representation of Identity and Aspiration**

The perceived socio-political and cultural unrest leads to local aspirants from the North-eastern region to choose mega cities of mainland India for their desired upbringing. Taking this as the true picture of the region and media content about clashes of mismatches among all India students' groups has led us to question the role of media on how it, in its various modes of representation, projects the issues.

Multiethnic regional population still intends to keep traditional identity, which is mostly being practiced and performed as cultural practices. As can be seen in logos and symbols of the products of Northeast, to give local flavour of origin to the outside audiences, time and again, there are attempts to balance the ethnic identity retention, inviting national as well as global features.

The media texts' identity representations and the local new generations' thinking and aspirations of aspects of 'reality', need to be looked into. A pilot study was carried out in this effect on two groups of students, from colleges in Guwahati and Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati, from time to time on various occasions, which transparent that presence of such national institute in this region assisting meeting with local students that gives a national flavour that can give a scope in surfacing local identity as well as disbursing its essence to the national and global audience. And thus a need was felt to look into role of media ethics in information representation with specific reference to the situation of Northeast India.

### **1.3 Thesis initiative**

This thesis deals with representation of Assam in particular and Northeast in general in media, accepted themes of media focus, newer scopes of media reporting, and the challenging role of media to project motivating image about the state of Assam to a wider range of media consumers. It looks at an analysis based on the observations on these groups of ambiances, through various methods of representation ideologies being framed and perspectives created. In this thesis, an attempt is being made to determine which features of incidents of violence in Assam in particular make them receive more media attention and what process goes behind the media representations of Assam with elaborate study of media practitioners from the region.

#### **1.3.1 Rationale for the Study**

The present study is an attempt to understand the media producers' overt and covert intentions in communicating instances of violence in Assam. Media products, especially news with the basic motive of information communication, are often a glimpse of the actual (people, places or events) most of it is either unknown or not represented except the sensational part which is capable of attracting a large varied audience.

Like many other social scientists that the mass media were 'agents of social change' with miraculous powers to bring change in the society. Media has the potential to widen horizons, focus attention, raise aspirations etc. Media possesses immense power to rein on public, create public opinions, perceptions, faiths and beliefs. But it is questionable if media disposes enough responsibility that comes with the immense power, to handle serious social issues, to take human emotion further to social development without hurting sentiments and not enraging people. Thus it becomes important to study the effectiveness and appropriateness in various representations in media. Elements responsible to make effective media communication which posses the power to affect people and shape ideologies may be a specific area of study in media studies with specific reference to Assam, a typical context of multi-cultural heterogenic harmonious society with great variations in the production groups as well as audience groups.

## **1.4 Aim and Objectives of the Study**

The study aims at analysing the role of media in representing violence and its effect on the masses with specific reference to Assam.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The key objective is to study the perception, intention and responses of selected print and electronic media houses in Assam to media representation of violence

1. To examine the patterns that emerge from examining the responses of various media houses to the representation of violence.
2. To assess changes or shifts, if any, in representation of violence in media.
3. To study institutional and cultural mechanisms responsible for such responses, patterns and variations.

## **1.5 Methods and Material**

### **Methodology**

Content analysis has been used to find out the descriptive analytical accounts of the patterns reflected in the process of the research. Bernard Berelson defined Content Analysis as “a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of manifest content of communications” (Berelson 74). “Content analysis is a research method that uses a set of procedures to make valid inferences from text. These inferences are about the sender(s) of the message, the message itself, or the audience of the message. The rules of this inferential process vary with the theoretical and substantive interests of the investigator” (Weber 9). Though content analysis was regularly performed in the 1940s, it became a more credible and frequently used research method since the mid-1950's, as researchers started to focus on concepts rather than simply words, and on semantic relationships rather than just presence (de Sola Pool 2).

In media, content analysis helps define and understand media profile by evaluating media texts, issues, messages, media and journalists, etc. Media content analysis evaluation is found useful for mainly understanding how journalists and publications interpret key messages, represent them for the public to consume and the impact of coverage on regional, national and international target audiences.

Media content analysis was found effective to uncover prevailing trends in media representation in the region. In this study as intended, it helps in understanding media makers' responses to the raised question, changes in journalistic positions and the reflection of these opinions in their respective media products. As many today agree that the most accurate and objective way of understanding trend in media is through media content analysis, Content analysis in this study has been used to discover the differences and similarities in opinions and understanding of media persons regarding representation of violence in media, and also impact of perceptions of violence representation on the media products. In the study, content analysis has been deployed to analyse mainly the interview material.

### **Methodology Specifications:**

1. Qualitative research: Content analysis
2. Data collection, sampling, coding, analysis, writing, design regarding the representation pattern of violence in media with reference to Assam.
3. Method of data collection

In-depth personal interviews (problem centered interview, expert interview, online interviews) with media persons from different media houses- electronic and print, and freelance media persons; students, academicians, local residents (media consumers) serves as the primary data for the present study.

Along with interviews (verbal data) Visual data (selective media texts collected from selective media houses and archival information) and Mediated data (available documents, news reports and other representations in media on violence in media in Assam) were also used for study.

4. Resources available: media houses of the region, senior journalists, experts on media in region, academic media institutions, local residents as well as non-residents of Assam

The population from which data are drawn include:

- People employed in media houses
- Owners of media houses
- Students
- Academicians/experts
- Local residents

5. Boundaries of the analysis are
  - Locale: Assam in particular with specific references clubbing Northeast as a whole.
  - Media houses with head offices located in Guwahati, Assam (mostly operating for all the seven Northeastern states from a central office based in Guwahati)
  - Respondents (media producers and media consumers)
6. Comparative analyses of Representation trends followed by media houses and individual journalists, with reference to specific location, events and people of Northeast in general and Assam in particular has been done.
7. Sampling: Theoretical/ Purposive sampling
8. Aim of data analysis: To find out the representation patterns of violence in media with specific reference to Assam and Northeast India as a whole, purpose and intentions.

Through the process of qualitative content analysis the present study aims at analysing not only the manifest content material but also the latent content as themes, ideas and contexts of the derived texts (responses). Accordingly the target of the inferences (Krippendorff) is to cull out the latent meaning from the manifest content. Thus content analysis in the study examines meanings, themes and patterns manifested in the interview responses along with extracting objective content from them.

For getting first hand field information from the residents of Guwahati and around, representing local as well as non-locals (from various other parts of country and outside) perceptions, were spoken to, towards being informed about the region through media and what they actually feel about the information and represented reality. In an attempt to understand the media producers' intentions in communicating instances of violence in Assam, media experts from the region and people working in media and outside media were interviewed.

The initial survey was done on the following selective subject groups.

1. Students
2. Local residents and experts
3. Media people

Groups 1 and 2 were surveyed to get their opinion about the region so as to get the feel of what needs to be actually enquired to the media people. Some media persons were also spoken to initially to get an idea of present scenario that perceives regarding representation of Assam in Media. As they (Groups 1 and 2) validated the concerned issue of representation of Assam mostly through violence, and the media persons spoken also reflected similar views, thus accordingly the interview questionnaire was designed for the research.

### **Subject Selection**

To get the peoples feedback on representation of violence and its effect in the local as well as national scenario and the role of media they perceive to be responsible, a survey strategy was developed. Instead of common paper based questionnaire survey with a structured questionnaire to likely to be respondents, discussions were held to serve the base information format and while meeting people from different backgrounds the issues were discussed and relevant information was collected. The discussions were designed to extract views on the following points:

1. To understand the views of the local people who are on the miss out, due to the unrestful representation of Assam and Northeast India as a whole.
2. To know the aspirations of local students' community who are going to take lead to face today's development in reality with reference to the projection in media.
3. People from other places of India coming to the region, their previous perceptions and later understanding about the ground reality.
4. To see the overall feeling of media responsibility towards helping the changing face of the society image due to mixing of local and other part of people aspiring national integrity and prosperity.
5. Appropriateness of media representation of Assam in particular and Northeast in general.

The thesis work was initiated with a pilot study with selective 90 respondents to identify the specific parameters relevant to work on media representations in reference to Assam. Gathering the views on role of media from the above mentioned survey population, the enquiry strategy was framed that directed the further detailed

study. The responses confirmed representation of violence in media for further study which was elaborately carried on 112 respondents as the main thesis work.

### **Structure of the Thesis**

The thesis consists of five chapters.

#### **Chapter I**

##### **Introduction: Theoretical perspectives on Media, Representation and Violence**

The first chapter is the introductory chapter ranging from role of media and media studies to conceptualising violence in respect of media representations. This chapter also introduces the boundaries of the study area and subject with specific reference to the term-conflict reporting and prevalent media scenario in Assam and Northeast.

#### **Chapter II**

##### **Media Representation and Reality in Assam**

This chapter identifies the conflict in the persistent media scenario. Whereas the image of the region is understood as “paradise in peril” the media representations are found to be unwilling to break the prejudices and stereotypes that have been constantly feed to the media consumers, not confining to the boundaries of the locale. This chapter concentrates on the views gathered from, students, academicians, experts, local residents of Guwahati and around representing local as well as non-local sentiments; on receiving media texts containing factual information of mostly violence only and what they actually feel about the information against the reality. It summarises a survey conducted on a cross section of people, that tells there is a need to relook into the media representation of the figure and fact that necessarily do not serve as only news but also serves as an after effect tool towards creating a assertive or non assertive ambience in the mind of readers and viewers regarding the region.

#### **Chapter III**

##### **Understanding Media Representation of Violence in Assam**

This chapter explores the understanding of the representation of violence of media houses of Assam. It aims at understanding and analysing through representations of facts and figures of violence what image of the society is being projected to the audience and what may the intentions of the media producers behind the projection,

apart from exploring their understanding of the theoretical concepts of representation, violence and *politics of representation*.

#### **Chapter IV**

##### **Violence, Gender and Ethnicity Issues in Assam and the Northeast**

The fourth chapter reflects specific aspects of the media representations related to the locale and representation of violence - the gender issues, indigenous identity issues, peace talks in light of extremism and others. This chapter also identifies the possibilities and expectations of positive representation in media of the region as per the responses derived.

#### **Chapter V**

##### **Conclusion**

The fifth and the concluding chapter is specifically the summary of the findings with remarks on framework for positive representation of events and to evaluate if such system can be practiced, feasibility studied. This also highlights the limitations of the study along with the scope for further research in the field.

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## **Chapter II**

### **Media Representation and Reality in Assam**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

Media influences the image building of the society it represents. Uncensored information about violence has become a priority in media communication today, especially in reference to Northeast India as a whole and Assam in particular. News has become one of the necessary life commodities today and violence is a common gimmick designed to capture and hold viewers' attention. The media producers concentrate on market audience research programmes to design media texts which often results in homogeneity of products. Like any other product news today is packaged, advertised and is sold; and has become a part of an integrated market system and dominant ideology of profit making. Coverage of violence specific to Northeast, mostly in news item, is more oriented towards sensationalising stories rather than educating or informing the audiences.

Media representation can create certain images and confirm, reconfirm or reject the already created perceptions. When media content becomes so important and an integral part of society and its functioning, what is being represented in its content, in what way, why and how also becomes equally important. Violence can be unnecessary and overemphasised in media, with the effects of cultivation or desensitisation. Media representations of violence do not only reflect real life, but also shape the way we understand and make sense of violence in the context of our own lives and society (Boyle 2005). And here comes in the concept of ethics in representation that leads to positive or negative perception creation.

Reporting of an event is selective to emphasise the specific context and purpose. Those who are either reading the print media or viewing the electronic media get the same view as being projected; that many a times does not match with the reality. Hence a need was felt to see the ground reality about the place and people what they think about themselves as being represented, mostly in a negative way, what are their

views. People perception survey in reference to the media representation and the reality thus conceived.

## **2.2 Media Commercialisation**

News presentation has become one of the necessary life commodities today and violence is a common gimmick designed to capture and hold viewers' attention. Similar market audience research programmes enable the media producers to design desirable media texts and often lead to various mass scale productions of homogeneous media products. With news becoming a part of an integrated market system with dominant ideology of profit making media persons "directly feel pressured to report certain stories over others due to owners' or advertisers' financial concerns" which in extremely competitive settings "leads journalists to favour profitability over journalistic value" (Uscinski 9).

Competition for audience is severe, and for maximum exposure, highest sponsorship and extreme income all media houses package information in a way, using various attracting tools, of which sensationalising violence seems to top the list (Kolker 2009). Reports involving incidents of violence appear daily in various modes of media, newspapers, internet, radio, television etc. (Fourie 2010: 415). Violence has become a priority in media communication today, especially in reference to Northeast India as a whole and Assam in particular.

### **2.2.1 Media Effect and Northeast India**

Northeast India is referred to as the "paradise in peril" (Subba 158). Out of everything that happens in the region only selective negative aspects and conflicts of the region get reflected in the media and percolate into public consciousness beyond local boundaries. Coverage of violence appears to be motivated by the profit margin, and often bends on the sensationalist ones.

As issues selected for representation in media are also prioritised based on their populist appeal, the most popular subject matter attracts most of the media attention and sustains upon repetitive representation without much review or reconsideration. With the accepted popularity of conflict and violence among media consumers over

time, it may be rightly said that economic competition for viewers may be termed as a probable cause that leads to more and more depictions of violence in media (Prince 237). Media reports from the region which have over time proved to be money-making as well as well-accepted are news reports about instances of violence. Northeast is used as a fertile plot for such marketisation of violence. And a certain kind of reports only get projected where as various other aspects which may be important are neglected by media. “Political violence- murders, bombings, kidnappings, extortions militants, killing of militants by security forces in actual or staged encounters- has become a routine part of news from the Northeast” (Baruah 2005: 61). The prejudiced perceptions are further reinforced by media leading to even stronger perception creation.

People living outside these regions have a mediated and largely distorted picture of the region and the people. The region gets least projected in the mainstream media and whatever little is adopted by the media are very selective aspects of the region. Local media of the region have also not been able to satisfy the needs of the region and the people in improving the media scenario. Infact inappropriate representation of facts by the media may be identified as one of the major causes of furthering the conflicts and tensions in the multiethnic settings of the Northeast (Kath et al. 68).

### **2.3 Violence Representation: Media and Northeast India**

Appropriately stated by experts media productions, from newspapers to computer games, are pieces in circulation of capital (Kolker 26). While reflecting upon traditional forms of news media, in print- the newspaper and electronic- the television, it is also found that information that are expected to be accepted by the media consumers are the only ones that qualify to be news and thus represented; and that too to keep up with the media consumers’ demands and thus maintain the profit margins in the media industry.

Extensive reporting of violence from the region may also be attributed to this media practice and mentality. Reflecting upon the media approach towards the whole of Northeast and its people, studies suggest that the region has received increased attention with the focus primarily on “terror” but otherwise various other aspects have

escaped media acknowledgments and representations with the region being termed as “politically and culturally insignificant” (McDuaie-Ra 94). Some such coverage which have over time proved to be very money-making as well as well-accepted are report stories about acts of violence especially on innocent and vulnerable individuals or groups, human rights violations, and the failure of the relevant official bodies to address the matter or to deliver justice, sufferings and terror struck people. The purpose of representation of violence in media actually is to act as information carriers or mediator between the state apparatus and the common people, either communicating facts to the public far and wide or bringing facts in notice of the authority to hold the perpetrators of the violence accountable for their actions. But in doing so what is most of the time ignored or neglected is the fact that most of the representations are often incomplete in information and are based on partial information, less or improper research. It may also be argued that reporting of various such instances and events are not directed towards the societal benefit by informing the media consumers, but in doing so certain individual, group or organizational goals are met. Furthermore only a specific category of reports get seen to get projected in media whereas various other aspects which may be significant and requires revelation are neglected.

Similar is the case of Northeast India and the media industry here. The region is a cultural and ethnic microcosm with sometimes conflicting ideologies and issues. And out of everything that happens in the region only the negative aspects and conflicts of the region get reflected in the media. Moreover many believe that this misrepresentation in turn leads to further conflicts, tensions and violence. Therefore inappropriate representation by the media is identified as one of the major causes of violence in the multiethnic settings of northeast (Kath et al. 68). While talking about Naga Peace Process, Girin Phukon in his essay ‘Politics of Peace Process in North-East India, A case of Nagaland’ argues that numerous incidents of human rights violation on the Nagas happen without being known to the outside world because of inaccessibility of the region and backwardness particularly in media world (Biswas and Thomas 376).

Over the time it is seen that most the incidents of violence in the Northeast which have attracted media attention (mainstream as well as locals) are either politically charged; or are by some militant or ethnic group to either grab attention, show strength, sustenance and growth or to terrify people and government. The issue that has often escaped academicians and industry is that how far is media being used by such groups as a medium to communicate and if at all it is being used is it justifiable enough to give in to such the aspirations of these individuals or groups, to gain TRPs. Most communication researchers acknowledge that systematic analysis of television's content known as message system analysis is extremely important. It identifies and assesses the most recurrent and stable patterns of television content, such as the consistent images, portrayals, and values that cut across most types of programmes (Signorielli and Morgan 10). Reflection on similar light, content analysis proves that media texts on Northeast India define the region as bomb blasts, terrorism, infiltration and tribes. "Political violence- murders, bombings, kidnappings, extortions militants, killing of militants by security forces in actual or staged encounters- has become a routine part of news from the Northeast." (Baruah 2005: 61) The prejudiced perceptions are further reinforced by media leading to even stronger perception creation.

Talking about a representational shift in fictional films in 1980s to 1990s M. Mehdi Semati, in his essay 'Sex, Violence, and Hollywood's Imagery' (2001) mentions about the shift from physical violence to violence of a different kind in Hollywood movies, "cultural violence of representation that obliterates what cannot be assimilated. The violence these films inflict on the diverse people and cultures of the Middle East, and on the viewers, lies not in what they depict but in what they fail to depict: the Middle East as a place where people live their lives, get married, go to work every day, enjoy food, go to school, listen to music, pay mortgages, live everyday lives... lives not so extraordinary" (Kamalipour and Rampal 257). These films are the only source through which the rest of the world understands what Middle East is. And if this portrayal is imperfect than the impression of the world regarding the region is also obvious to be imperfect. Similar is the case of Northeast India, it is only the media projection that enables the rest of the country as well as world to built perception regarding the region. Probably media (mainstream as well as local) has

been playing an integral role in creating an adverse image of fear and uncertainty, and propagating this distorted image to the world.

As per Gerbner's '*mean world syndrome*' people who consume a lot of media violence tend to believe that the world is more dangerous than it is in reality. As viewers' perceptions of the world conform to the violent depictions they see on television, they become more passive, more anxious, and more fearful. Similar is the case of Northeast India also. The only media coverage the northeast attracts is that of violence and unrest. Thus it is natural for the receivers to believe that this part of the world is more violent and unsafe and that people living in this region and situations here are alien to them. In places like Northeast India, people living outside these regions have a mediated and largely distorted picture of the region and the people.

Another aspect of 'mean world syndrome' Gerbner says is the lack of diversity in media where virtually racial and ethnic classes are disproportionately left out or ignored. As media (television) emphasises on violence, conflict, and projection of white male prime-of-life power, media consumers develop a sense of denial. Viewer sections who find neglected place in media or minorities in media who see members of their own group underrepresented but over-victimised develop a greater sense of apprehension, mistrust, and alienation. (Kamalipour and Rampal 18) This holds true for the Northeastern region as well. For example separatist's movements have affected Assam, Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland to a large extent. These, similar to the movements occurred in Kashmir and Punjab are only different in the sense that Northeastern movements have not received much media attention like the others (Baruah 1999: 164). The region gets least projected in the mainstream media and whatever little is adopted by the media are very selective aspects of the region. Local media of the region have also not been able to satisfy the needs of the region and the people in improving the media scenario.

As Singh puts forth, apart from its professional obligation and business compulsions aiming at conflict and conflict resolution, media in Northeast must play a special role. The region straddled by atleast four foreign countries, Bhutan, Tibetan China, Myanmar and Bangladesh and ravaged by violent armed activities, deserves more

attention and understanding on the part of media. Thus research on media where people's aspirations are reflected, assumes great significance (Singh 1998: 147). As Nalin Mehta states, India's private television industry has grown at a furious pace but the task of unearthing its social impact has barely begun. (Mehta 2008: 56)

Kumar Nikhlesh in essay titled 'Trends in Sociological Research in North-East India' (1998) claims that the mainland media of India has often looked at the Northeast as perennially disturbed area with focus on either Indian security concerns or militant activities launched by various ethnic groups. In long run it has been seen that the concern is about the insecurity and killings and not about the people. Big media houses have no time and space to report about the people who despite adverse situation (if any) are still coping with them (Singh1998: 146). But what is to be noted here is this concern of the people and important issues being neglected by media has been raised by Kumar, Professor of North-Eastern Hill University (NEHU) Shillong, Meghalaya- a resident of the region itself. But how far does the world know of it and the gap between the region and media.

It is noticeable that coverage of violence specific to Northeast, mostly in news items, is more oriented towards sensationalising stories rather than educating or informing the audiences. As violence has more news and visual value, often political and extremist groups resort to violence to get noticed by mass media. Moreover many believe that this misrepresentation in turn leads to further conflicts, tensions and violence. Inappropriate representation in media is identified as one of the major causes of violence in the multiethnic settings of northeast. With marketisation of news, and constant patterned representation of violence from and of the region, news from Northeast has become more of a negatively advertised product. It is a concern today that if media disposes enough responsibility that comes with the immense power, to handle serious social issues, to take human emotion further to social development without hurting sentiments and not enraging people. Thus it becomes important to study the effectiveness and appropriateness in various mass scale productions of homogeneous media products. This thesis thus also looks into the consensus of media related personalities specifically from in and around Guwahati city of Assam, contemplating positive mediation of regional issues in media.

### **2.3.1 Northeast Scenario: Inappropriate Media Representation**

Media has the potential to widen horizons, focus attention and raise aspirations. Media possesses immense power to rein on public, create public opinions, perceptions, faiths and beliefs. But it is questionable if media disposes enough responsibility that comes with the immense power, to handle serious social issues, to take human emotion further to social development without hurting sentiments and not enraging people. Thus it becomes important to study the effectiveness and appropriateness in various representations in media, with specific reference to Assam, a typical context of multi-cultural heterogenic harmonious society with great variations in the production groups as well as audience groups.

Perception of mainland media of India towards the Northeast has been that of a perennially disturbed area with focus on either Indian security concerns or militant activities launched by various ethnic groups (Singh 1998). It can be noted that though Professor Kumar of NEHU Shillong, a resident of the region itself, has raised the point, concerns of the people and important issues being neglected by media, still how far does the outside world know of it and how much have they comprehended the gap between the region and media to be complete reality.

It draws attention to understand the residents of this region, of their aspirations and representation of their being in media, to appropriate positive identity, to motivate self and for others to express their being. Such media coverage needs to be looked into in current context of increasing market influence and commercialisation. An enquiry in this effect has been carried out on media experts and people from the Northeastern region specific to Assam.

### **2.3.2 Media Representation against Reality**

Northeast India has always been represented in media in violent images, usually through stereotypical projection. And moreover the region is believed to have been denied due space and time in the so called mainstream media. To grab quick attention, events with sensational images are mostly represented, which create negative impact of the region and people among a wider audience. Through media representation the positive identity and positive impression about a particular person place or event,

should be communicated rather than reinforcing prejudices and emphasising stereotypes. Over time it is seen that most of the incidents of violence in the Northeast have attracted media attention. Available literature suggests that media text on and from the Northeast mostly tends to define the region as per the saleable value of news content which reinforces the prejudiced perceptions leading to even stronger perception creation.

This examines the current functioning of media in portraying the region and specifically deals with patterned projection of Northeast India and studies the role of media to project motivating images of the local being. It looks into few selected instances of representation of Assam in news and how it affects the local imaging based on a survey on local respondent's perceptions and aspirations. Students from selected academic institutions (representing local as well and nationwide views) of Guwahati and media industry representatives' views were taken into consideration to figure out the present state of the region and the reflected reality in media. This calls for relooking into the media format of stereotypical projection of the region that has been neglecting many other facets of reality.

The projection of the north-eastern region and its people in the media may be said to be in sync with the 'popular culture' which cannot be taken as complete reality. Over time it is seen that most the incidents of violence in the Northeast which have attracted media attention (mainstream as well as locals) are understood to be either politically charged; or are by some militant or ethnic group to either grab attention, show strength, sustenance and growth or to scare people and government. Violence featured in media are mostly politically motivated violence such as demonstrations, arsons, riots, and clashes with police etc which affect a larger section of masses, rather than those of crime. As violence has more news and visual value, often political and extremist groups resort to violence to get noticed by mass media (Gupta 65).

It is also seen that representations in media of northeast mostly revolve around the issue relating to ethnic identity which the media has been highlighting in certain negative light focusing on the violence. Content analysis proves that media texts on Northeast India define the region by bomb blasts, terrorism, infiltration and tribes. If

not for out of control massacres, riots, curfews, agitations and other incidents of violence eruption, Northeast remains unnoticed and neglected (Hazarika 1994: 63). Such coverages which have over the time proved to be very money-making as well as well-accepted are report stories about acts of violence and the Northeast is used as a fertile plot for such marketisation.

A certain kind of reports only get projected, whereas various other aspects which may be important, like perception of ethnic lifestyle identity, myriad tradition and cultural heterogenic harmony and aspiration towards future, are neglected by media. It is seen that many incidents go unnoticed by the media, many are misreported, many denied coverage branding it to be less important compared to news from mainland India and incidents are only covered that fit into the existing set of prejudices regarding the region, which are again self created by media itself. That is why it can be in a way justified to call the northeastern part of the country 'paradise in peril'. And as these have become the only projected issues outside the region, even though the media cannot be always blamed for providing the bias; but many a times the media can be held responsible for stirring up the prejudices that lie deep within people. The prejudiced perceptions, about the region as being disturbed and situations frightening, are further reinforced by media leading to even stronger perception creation. As a result people living outside these regions have a mediated and largely distorted picture of the region and the people.

Extensive isolation and neglect mainly due to location and poor connectivity with the rest of India have all played a part in creating this scenario and generating the perception. Many believe the region lacks the sense of belonging and inclusive national identity. Similarly, with the emphasis on violence, conflict, and projection of white male prime-of-life power, media consumers develop a sense of denial. Viewer sections who find neglected place in media or minorities in media who see members of their own group underrepresented but over-victimised develop a greater sense of apprehension, mistrust, and alienation (Kamalipour and Rampal 2001). This holds true for the Northeastern region as well. For example ethnic separatists' movements have affected Assam, Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland to a large extent. These, similar to the movements occurred in Kashmir and Punjab, are only different in the sense that

Northeastern movements have not received media attention like the others (Baruah 1999).

The region gets least projected in the mainstream media and whatever little is adopted by the media are very selective aspects of the region mostly focusing on the identity and ethnicity issues clubbed with conflict and violence. Local media of the region have also not been able to satisfy the needs of the region and the people in improving the media scenario. Numerous incidents of human rights violation on the various indigenous people happen without being known to the outside world because of inaccessibility of the region and backwardness particularly in media world (Biswas and Thomas 2006). Mainland media of India has often looked at the Northeast as perennially disturbed area with focus on either Indian security concerns or militant activities launched by various ethnic or extremist groups. In long run it has been seen that the concern is about the insecurity and acts of violence and not about the people. Big media houses have no time and space to report about the people who despite adverse situation (if any) are still coping with them (Singh 1998). Of the causes of violence in the state of Assam, as cited by various respondents in a study undertaken by North-Eastern Students' National Integration Movement in 2001 to 2005, it was found that media influence and feeling of hurt and rejection figure as influencing factors (Kallarackal 89). It is the accepted understanding of the region as underdeveloped, economically backward and at the same time detached from the mainstream India; is what makes the disorders of the region durable; put as “lends legitimacy to today’s durable disorders” (Baruah 2005: 25).

The role played by media has been enormous in shaping up Northeast to what it is today (Baruah 2005). Various media intrusions into the political in social scenario are affecting the people and the region as a whole and even outside the boundaries. These include representations in stereotypical manner of brutality, extremism, emphasising certain ideologies etc which in many cases might be different from what it was expected to be like; and branding most of the conflicts of the region as ethnic. The role of media in the region along with many other parts needs to be redefined, if the media in Northeast needs to function for the wellbeing of the society or for dissemination and promotion of ideologies or for disseminating terror in the region and about the region

outside. It draws attention to look into the ground realities, what is being projected by media and how much of it is justified.

### **2.3.3 Projection versus Reality: Media Marketisation**

The present situation in terms of media representations can be said to be only selective and patterned which is basically due to the pertinent commercial attitude. In case of Northeast the discriminatory behaviour of the mainstream media can be seen on the way representations of the region in media has been restricted to specific issues and nature. With marketisation of news, and constant patterned representation of violence from and of the region, news from the region has become more of a negatively advertised product. Thus it becomes important to study the effectiveness and appropriateness in various mass scale productions of homogeneous media products.

The issue that has often escaped academicians and industry is that how far is media being used as a medium to communicate reality and how much is to earn TRPs only; and if at all it is being used as communication with commercial gains, is it justifiable to give in to the aspirations of individuals or groups to gain TRPs at the cost of the identity of the whole region and its people. It needs to be re-looked into whether the media representations really go along with aspirations and life philosophy of the locals; how much of what is shared to the other parts of country and beyond is the true prevalent picture. The role of media highly plays significant in defining the region, mainstream attention towards only saleable sensational issues from Northeast (national as well as local media) only results in not-so-true Northeast being defined to media consumers, masses.

It presents combination of views on representation of violence in media with the opinions expressed by the media experts and the media users, comprising both locals and non-locals, even residents and non-residents of the region from both the said groups. It deals with patterned projection of Northeast in media and studies the role of media to project motivating images of the local being. It looks into few selected instances of representation of northeast in news and how it affects the local imaging based on a survey on local respondent's perceptions in one hand and aspirations on the other. Students from selected academic institutions of Guwahati and media industry

representatives' views were taken into consideration to figure out the present state of the region and the reflected reality in media. This transparently shows a need to relook into the media format of stereotypical projection of the region, that has been neglecting many other facets of reality.

### **2.3.4 Perception Creation by Media**

To understand the prevailing media scenario and the motivating factors behind it, selective experts responded giving the following view that reflect Northeast in general and Assam in particular have been represented in media in a manner which is in a way not similar to the representation of the rest of the parts of India even during similar cases. Below are some instances which emerged while interacting with the respondents and referring to some of their writings.

#### **Example 1: Mumbai and Guwahati blasts' coverage**

Media especially news channels in Mumbai blasts case for the first two days were just reporting the event. But from the third day there were feature stories talking about gaining back of strength and confidence and fighting back. More or less news headlines were like "Mumbai limping back to normalcy" (PTI). Now in the case of Guwahati the blasts were reported as it is for the initial days and then there were no follow up stories. And so there was no gaining back of power to normalcy. Even if the local news media tried to do continuous follow ups for a few days the national media ignored the after-effects. This is only one instance, but repeated incidents of similar nature and different kinds of media coverage, has facilitated creation of strong perceptions regarding different media treatment about different places facing similar incidents. While Mumbai is understood to be a city which never gives up, Assam is perceived by and large as a terror stricken state which is accustomed to live in violence.

#### **Example 2: DY365 channel**

"Enough is enough. Editorial desk of DY365 has decided not to telecast any news of *Bandh* call in future." stated a social networking post by the channel. DY365, a satellite channel from Assam, had recently taken a decision of not airing any news of *Bandh* (strikes) in the state. This came after the High Court verdict of illegal *Bandhs*.

Here raises the question can the national media also not exercise these kinds of selective omissions in order to generate and maintain peace in the region and also to propagate a better positive image to the rest of the world outside the region. The media can atleast take stand to showcase the steps taken by the administration to maintain normalcy and also do proper follow up stories regarding unrestful events and situations.

### Example 3: *Doordarshan* versus private players

News content analysis of the news channels shows that while *Doordarshan Northeast* (public service broadcaster) portrays variety in their programmes. But other news channels focus on issues like that of violence to grab easy attention. The reason behind this was said to be the non profit motive of *Doordarshan* being a public broadcaster by the respondents. On the other hand the highly maintained profit margin of the private owned news channels define the news content which is more or less maintaining prejudiced facts of the region being disturbed.

## 2.4 Pilot Investigation towards Framing Study Plan

Students of local origin as well as from students from outside the state, residents of Guwahati, and media relevant people were met with as a pilot investigative measure, so that a structured information collection system could be formulated.

Views from youth were gathered from students of Handique Girls College, Assam Engineering Institute, Girls Polytechnic College, as local representation, where 30 students in each institution in different group compositions (ranging from Higher secondary level to Master degree level), were met with specific purpose of getting their views and responses about their perception of representation of the region in media and following consequences. Group of students from Institute of Hotel Management Guwahati, Guwahati Medical College, Tezpur University, Kendriya Vidyalaya Khanapara and random selection from time to time of students across IIT Guwahati as national representation were selected. These institutes with local students as well as students from other parts of the country which makes a comfortable mixing of locals and non-locals were interacted with and collective opinion was obtained on the same. Nine academicians (three members of the faculty from each institute) from

IIT Guwahati, Assam Institute of Management, Department of Mass Communication and Journalism of Tezpur University were also spoken to.

14 residents of Guwahati engaged in different occupations were selected through purposive sampling (who appeared apparently well informed about the prevalent scenario and knowledgeable about media representation; they were chosen from the references obtained from previous meetings) in and around Guwahati as and when scopes emerged to take up the matter, were individually spoken to as part of the survey. Mostly the interviews and meetings were arranged in and around Guwahati, as the gateway to Northeast and one of the busiest city of the region, it is growing towards cosmopolitan city with a good representation of the Northeast population as a whole.

Some eminent personalities were also consulted; they include people from cultural field Guru Bipul Das, Anwasha Mahanta, Pradyut Bordoloi (State Minister of Power, Assam), Maga Nayak (Craft personality from Orissa on Assam tour) and others, along with academicians from Tezpur University to have cross-sectional opinion and views. And views of media practitioners and experts including Arnab Goswami (TimesNow), Ratnajit (Tehelka NE correspondent), Lassa R (Information Bureau officer Assam), Shabir Nishat (PRO, CM Assam), Pamela Philipose, Guest Editor, *The Thumb Print*; Indrani Raimedhi, Freelance Writer; Teresa Rehman, Editor *The Thumb Print*; Bhaswati Khaund Centre for Northeast studies, Delhi University; Sanjoy Hazarika) also spoken to. In addition some experts' views were compiled from their published articles in various media which include online content as well.

In an attempt to understand the media producers' intentions in communicating instances of violence in Assam, media experts from the region and people working in media and outside media were interviewed. Based in Guwahati, four regional television channels - *News Live*, *DY365*, *Frontier TV* and *Doordarshan Northeast*; and four newspapers- *The Telegraph*, *The Times of India*, *The Sentinel* and *The Seven Sisters Post*, have been surveyed. The television channels are selected based on highest viewership among the rest of the regional channels of Assam. Whereas *The Telegraph* and *The Times of India* are national news dailies having regional editions,

*The Sentinel* and *The Seven Sisters Post* are regional newspapers, all published in English are selected with circulation even outside Assam so that responses would be not confined to local views and aspirations. From the industry, respondents were interviewed from each media house (4 television channels and 4 newspaper organisations). Interview material collected was compiled and the common facts summarised. Thus the enquiry strategy was framed, people interviewed. The categorised summary of the responses are given below.

### 2.4.1 Categorised Summary of Pilot Investigation Responses

A total of 90 respondents were asked to cite five incidents or issues from Assam, which had gained media attention beyond regional boundaries, national coverage.

The question was initially asked about the state of Assam, but as the respondents were seen to have a tendency to talk about certain incidents of others Northeastern states as well, and were unable to pronounce five events only from Assam; the boundary was extended to all of the northeastern states. And thus responses were gathered from random individuals belonging to the student community, local residents, academicians and selective media persons on reports from Northeast gaining National coverage. Their responses were categorised, accordingly ranked and presented in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1: Responses to choose five Reports from Northeast gaining national coverage (respondents 90, responses 450)

Sl. no.	Incidents recalled by respondents	No of responses	Rank	Category of news
1.	GS Road incident July, 2012	28	3	<b>Violence</b>
2.	BTAD riots in 2012 (Kokrajhar, Chirang, Dhubri Violence)	46	1	<b>Violence</b>
3.	Ganeshguri serial blasts on 30 October 2008	31	2	<b>Violence</b>
4.	Irom Chanu Sharmila's fast/ anti-AFSPA campaign in Manipur	28	3	Protest
5.	Brahmaputra dam issue/ protests/ KMSS protests	3	18	Protest
6.	NSCN talks	2	19	Peace talks
7.	Rhino poaching	7	14	
8.	Agitation against Lower Subansiri Hydro Electric Power Project	2	19	Protest
9.	Thangjam Manoramam's killing and subsequent protests in July 2004	11	12	Protest
10.	Bhupen Hazarika's death on 5 <sup>th</sup> November 2011 funeral/ cremation	6	15	Culture
11.	Underground outfits in Northeast/ Terror attacks	27	4	<b>Violence</b>

12.	Ethnic riots/ Communal violence	22	6	<b>Violence</b>
13.	Brahmaputra floods/ 2004 floods/ 2012 floods	7	14	Flood
14.	Beltola violence of November 2007	17	9	<b>Violence</b>
15.	Nude Woman strike in Manipur against rape	14	11	Protest
16.	Gamosa making Guinness World Record	1	20	Achievement
17.	Mahendra Das hanging order	7	14	Judicial
18.	Japanese official in Assam looking for their forefather's remains of WWII	1	20	International Relations
19.	Elections	4	17	Political
20.	2011 KMSS protest at Dispur/ Akhil Gogoi Protest	10	13	Protest
21.	Anti-dam protests	3	18	Protest
22.	Arunachal CM helicopter crash	5	16	Accident
23.	Rape highest report in Meghalaya 2013	5	16	Gender issues
24.	Matrilineal culture of Meghalaya	3	18	Culture
25.	Save Loktak lake' campaign in Manipur	1	20	Protest
26.	Garo – Rabha conflict along Assam – Meghalaya border	21	7	<b>Violence</b>
27.	MLA Rumi Nath abused by public	4	17	Political scandal
28.	Assam Agitation/ Signing of the Assam Accord	1	20	Protest
29.	Nellie Massacre	5	16	<b>Violence</b>
30.	The Chinese attack on India	1	20	<b>Violence</b>
31.	Insurgency/ Infiltration/ D- voters issue in Assam	17	9	Insurgency
32.	Mass Exodus of Northeast after the ethnic violence in BTAD areas	20	8	<b>Violence</b>
33.	Mary Kom winning a Olympic Medal	4	17	Sports
34.	Dhubri boat accident in April 2012	3	18	Accident
35.	Hindi speaking people attacked	22	6	<b>Violence</b>
36.	Arabinda Rajkhowa/ ULFA leaders	6	15	Insurgency
37.	Naga Peace talks with NSCN (IM)	4	17	Peace talks
38.	Peace talks with ULFA leaders	4	17	Peace talks
39.	Asian car rally	1	20	International Relations
40.	Homecoming of Ranjan Daimari, NDFB chief	2	19	Peace talks
41.	Sarada fraud case- involvement of ministers	5	16	Political scandal
42.	<i>Bandhs/ strikes</i>	16	10	Protest
43.	Separate state demands in Assam and Nagaland/ related violence	23	5	<b>Violence</b>
	Total number of responses	<b>450</b>		

Out of total 20 categories of responses that respondents picked up on their own it was found that of the top 10 ranking categories, eight were of violence. Individually out of total 450 responses, 263 (58%) were of the category representing direct violence. Respondents' unanimously referred to Northeast India in general and Assam in

particular as always been neglected by mainstream or national media, with various subjectively significant issues and developments being missed out from public knowledge. Though the region does not find place in national media much, apparently the major issues, events and situations which have figured in media mostly are in sync with the known presumptions and projection patterns of the region. Thus it was seen in media archives and responses that the issues which have gained media attention are events affecting larger number of people. Echoing the collective feeling a respondent had rightly opined, “*Regional conflicts, attacks by extremists and floods feature prominently in national news papers and TV news channels*”.

#### **2.4.2 Responses from Students and Local Residents**

The students from outside the region who are in institutions like Indian Institute of Hotel Management Guwahati, Guwahati Medical College, Tezpur University, Indian Institution of Technology Guwahati, mostly accepted being sceptical to join an institution in the region. Apparently due to the negative image of the state represented in media the non-local residents feared coming to the state. Apparently as these institutions have all India examinations and ranks decide upon options to join an institution thus initial decision making and opting for an institution in the region for outsiders is less of choice but by no other choice.

Students’ community expressed their views and was found that they believe that the state has developed a lot and is developing and that extremism in the state is no hindrance to the development. But when people outside the region were asked about the same their view about Assam in particular and the Northeast in general, and the people here were only confined to the notion that locals from the region venture out in search of peace and education. It may be said that the proximity of negative media report has spread such information. And as the respondents also felt media representation to be an influencing factor for creating such perceptions about the region, need was felt for media content and prevalent representation patterns of the region to be re-looked into. It was found that the study calls for in-depth study from mass communication and journalism, academic as well as actual practice point of views.

Specifically the young and the elderly were enquired about their perception creation and impact of media representations. While the youth were found to be negatively informed about the society leading to mistrust, dissatisfaction and stress; the elderly consumers of media were apparently found to be rendered worried with hopelessness and stress of surviving in dangerous living conditions. This led to think if Northeast in reality provided such horrific living conditions or was most of the negative image created and propagated by media to use sensitive open ended information as profitable commodity; and if such occupation imposes stress on the working media practitioners, the journalists as well as the media consumers.

Based on the responses and the supporting archival evidences produced by the media houses, it was found that focus and emphasis throughout media houses has been given on violence incidents, generalising Northeast and Assam. Understanding of violence may be divided broadly into two major categories- individual violence and collective violence, depending upon the number of people involved in the act. Most identified instances of media representation of violence in regard to Assam and the Northeast were instances of collective violence going by the following definition: “Violent form of collective behaviour engaged in by large numbers of people responding to a common stimulus. Collective violence can be placed on a continuum, with one extreme involving the spontaneous behaviour of people who react to situations they perceive as uncertain, threatening, or extremely attractive. Riots and random youth gang fights are examples of spontaneous collective violence. At the other extreme are the organized forms of collective violence. These include coups, rebellions, revolutions, terrorism, and war” (Delaney).

Therefore the rest of the interview schedule was designed focusing on violence, specifically considering collective violence; and thus exclusive situations of individualistic violence have been kept out of the scope of the thesis.

For the purpose of the present study the term “media” is broadly used to mean traditional news organisations- newspapers; and news and current affairs television channels.

## 2.5 Identified sources considered for study

Towards attaining the thesis objective the following media houses of Assam, the newspapers and television channels were identified and considered for the study.

Table 2.2: Selected media houses

Sl. no.	Media houses	Name	Language
1.	Newspaper Houses	Adinor Sambad	Assamese
2.		Gana Adhikar	Assamese
3.		Ajir Dainik Batori	Assamese
4.		Dainik Jugasankha	Bengali
5.		Dainik Assam	Assamese
6.		Pratidin	Assamese
7.		The Sentinel	English
8.		Seven Sisters Post	English
9.		Eastern Chronicle	English
10.		Tehelka	English
11.		The Assam Tribune	English
12.		The Times of India (supplement)	English
13.		The Telegraph (supplement)	English
14.	News and Current Affairs Television Channels	News Live Assam	Assamese, English.
15.		DY 365	Assamese, English, Bengali, Hindi
16.		News Time Assam	Assamese
17.		Northeast Television (NETV)	Assamese
18.		Prime News	Assamese
19.		Frontier TV	Assamese, English, Bengali, Hindi
20.		DD (Northeast)	Assamese, English

Apart from the above enlisted media houses and respective media practitioners, various freelance media practitioners and media experts of the region were also identified as sources, who are associated with various media organisations at regional, national and international level.

## **2.6 Survey Questionnaire**

From the views gathered from selected students, local residents and academicians the full questionnaire was designed, keeping in mind the concerns and issues that need to be relooked upon regarding representation of Northeast and Assam through violence in media. Structured questionnaires (Appendix B) were given to specific individuals, to likely to be respondents, where respondent specific opinions were expected. Others (where discussing the whole questionnaire was not possible due to various factors including crunch of time and appointment availability) brief interactions were had, revealing context specific opinions regarding representation of the region and the study matter.

The questionnaire was specifically discussed in person with the media persons and accordingly to their expertise and relevant items of the questionnaire the responses are arranged in Chapter III and chapter IV accordingly. Most of the respondents reflect on their perceptions about reporting of violence in Assam as a representative of Northeast India.

## **2.7 Profile of Media Respondents**

A section of media persons were approached for the detailed survey as per the questionnaire. While many media practitioners approached were apparently enthusiastic about serious academic study being undertaken in the regional media field with respect to violence reporting and stereotypical projection which they felt actually needed academic as well as industry attention for scope of betterment; a section of media practitioners also refrained from responding citing professional hindrances and lack of proper knowledge. Respondents specifically refused to comment citing speculated professional hazards that may occur responding on specific issues like sub-nationalism, political involvement in media coverages, media ethics and professional secrecy of functioning. As a result responses were gathered only from those media practitioners who volunteered for the same.

### **2.7.1 Interview Methodology**

The present study deploys theoretical/ purposive sampling based on the knowledge of the likely to be respondents' population and the purpose of the study. In-depth

personal interviews with 112 respondents (59 from nine electronic media houses, 28 from 13 newspaper media houses and 25 freelance media persons) were held.

Table 2.3: Profile of the Respondents from Media Houses (N=112)

Television/ Electronic Media Houses	Newspaper Media Houses		Freelance Media Persons	Total Respondents
n=59	n=28		n=25	N=112
	English language Press	Vernacular language Press		
	21	7		

n= Sum total of respondents from various Media Houses

N= Sum total of respondents

Table 2.4: Respondents from nine television/electronic media houses (N=59)

DY 365	News Live	Frontier TV	Prime News	News Time Assam	DD News	NE TV	Aaj Tak	Asian News International	Total Respondents
16	5	13	4	4	9	6	1	1	N=59

N= Sum total of respondents

Table 2.5: Respondents from Eight English language newspaper media houses (N=21)

Seven Sisters Post	The Sentinel	The Times of India	Eastern Chronicle	Tehelka	The Telegraph	The Assam Tribune	Total Respondents
8	2	3	4	1	2	1	N=21

N= sum total of respondents

Table 2.6: Respondents from Vernacular press, five Assamese and one Bengali (N=7)

Dainik Assam (Assamese)	Pratidin (Assamese)	Ajir Dainik Batori (Assamese)	Dainik Jugasankha (Bengali)	Adinor Sambad (Assamese)	Gana Adhikar (Assamese)	Total Respondents
1	2	1	1	1	1	N=7

N= Sum total of respondents

Table 2.7: Responses from Freelancers\* (N=25)

Television media	Print media	Radio journalist	Photo-journalists	Web Journalists	Total Respondents
7	11	1	3	3	N=25

N= Sum total of respondents

\*25 Freelance (Table 6) media practitioners working in Assam, associated with specific media house and contributing to various other national and international agencies were approached. The freelancers who were available to comment during the survey include personalities like Editor, Jeevan magazine; Reporter, The Asian Age; Editor-In-Chief at Northeastnews.in; former BBC Correspondent, Photojournalist cum Independent Film Maker; Bureau Chief, Pratah Khabar Media Pvt Ltd; North-East Correspondent, Rajasthan Patrika; Sub-Editor, The Sentinel Group; Columnist, The Indian Express; Secretary of Guwahati Press Club; Chief Photographer at Little Hands Production; Transmission Executive, All India Radio; Associate Editor, The Arunachal Pioneer; former Times of India correspondent; Senior Journalist at Press Trust of India; Northeast correspondent for ETV news; Radio Jockey at South Asia FM; and independent film makers; photojournalists and documentarians, features writers, independent content developer, media experts and academicians from the field of Journalism and Mass Communication.

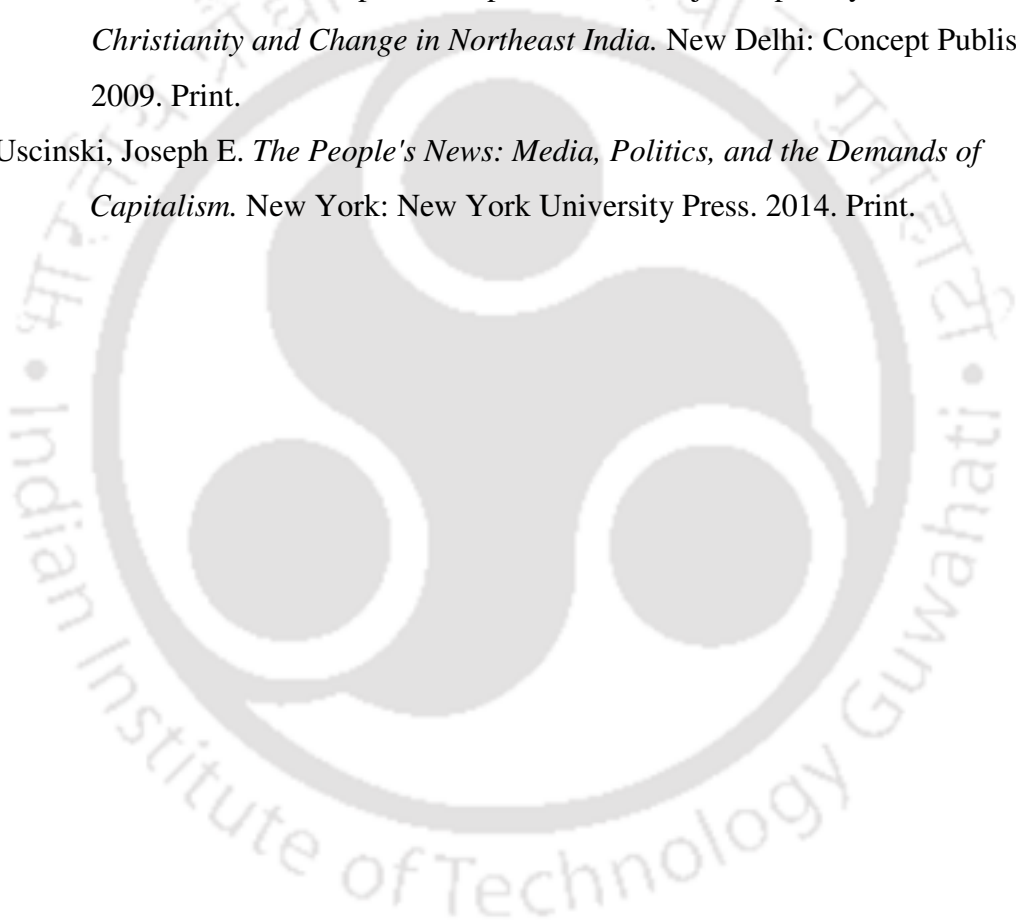
As the data intended for the research analysis was acquired by virtue of a verbal guarantee of anonymity promised to survey respondents before data collection, strict confidentiality regarding their identities and media affiliations have been maintained throughout the thesis in most instances. Therefore the list of media persons provided below consists of only the respondents' institutional designations and not names in order to protect respondents' anonymity.

Along with the above selected media persons who were approached for the detailed survey as per the questionnaire, views of practicing media experts including Arnab Goswami (Times Now), Ratnajit (Tehelka Northeast correspondent), Lassa R (Information Bureau officer Assam), Shabir Nishat (PRO, CM Assam), Pamela Philipose, Guest Editor, *The Thumb Print*; Indrani Raimedhi, Freelance Writer; Teresa Rehman, Editor *The Thumb Print*; Bhaswati Khaund Centre for Northeast studies, Delhi University; Sanjoy Hazarika) were compiled from their published articles in various media which include online content as well.

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## **Chapter III**

### **Understanding Media Representation of Violence in Assam**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

In the response to the pilot study that confirmed representation of violence in media in Chapter II, further investigation was elaborately carried out as the main thesis work. This chapter is an attempt to cite the theoretical perspectives of media persons' regarding representation of social violence in newspapers (print media) and visuals on television (electronic media). And brings out a scope of studying methods of innovative representation to convey messages in a positive and pleasurable way to the masses, specific to a section for which the window to the society is only these forms of media representations. There arises a need to control imaging and the way Northeast is being represented and portrayed to the world outside the region.

An exploratory inquiry into the procedure and criteria that goes behind the production of news content representing Assam; criteria and strategies that media practitioners employ to make relevant judgments regarding information collection, production, projection and presentation formats, was conducted. In-depth personal interviews were held to get first-hand information from 112 respondents. These interview transcripts served as the primary sources of data for content analysis. The analysis process was inductive and took a grounded theory approach with the interview transcripts emerging into categories on their own.

#### **3.2. Theoretical Understanding**

A journalist while framing his story may have his own set of ideologies, understanding and point of view influencing his work. Now he himself is the one to perform with his capacity to overcome his own perceptions and objectively report any act of violence and inform the consumers. The media consumers are in turn informed about specific instances and facts which either the individual media practitioner or the media organisation determines they (consumers) need to know, and thus specific facts are expressed through media representations in public interest. In present media

scenario to understand the process and intensions of representation in media, it becomes important to understand the ability, understanding and knowledge of media practitioners who are responsible for the representation of Assam in media.

### 3.2.1 Strategies of Programming

Programming strategies are the ways of approaching a media product. These are often the key tactics employed for attracting and retaining consumers. With commercialisation of media and commoditisation of news, it becomes important to understand the understanding that goes behind certain strategies that media makers employ to survive in the profit driven, highly competitive media industry. Along with identifying the strategies it is also essential to comprehend their selection criteria and also execute the strategies with utmost brilliance though the designated media communication.

The responses (Figure 3.1) on strategies to attract people to a particular programme may be categorised as below:

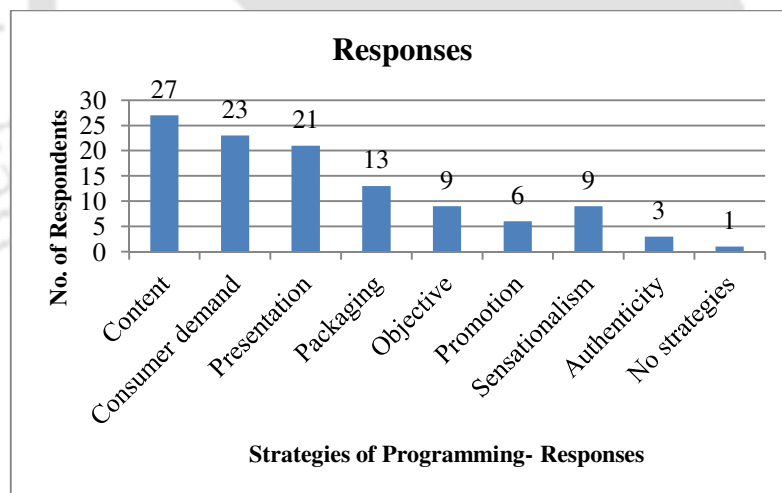


Figure 1: Responses on Strategies to Attract People to a Particular Programme

**Content:** As per the responses the most significant strategy employed by the media houses to attract people to a particular programme is the ‘content’. Content selection and development is given priority over any other aspect of programming, which includes the programme concept, scripting, visual images, audio effects, presenters, people involved and even distractions in the flow of information. 24% respondents (Figure 3.1) believed that media houses concentrate on media content and spend the maximum effort in identifying the proper content to be worked upon, covered and

released to its readers or viewers. Most often a pre-programming research is carried on to spot the appropriate matter for production. Reflecting the views of Danny Schechter (2003a) of news to have become “purveyor of infotainment”, respondents cited the need to place information in an entertaining manner in front of the audiences. The entertainment factor in the content is the most emphasised one by the respondents who believe only entertainment value of the programme, no matter how serious or distasteful the subject covered is the attraction gainer and retainer. Thus rightly said “entertainment has been a major theme of news” (Lynch 20). Selective responses stating content development as an important programming strategy are given below:

According to CEO and Content-Editor of a regional television news channel:

*The content and its presentation are very important, when we create content – be it news, entertainment or a lifestyle programme. The aesthetic sense is of immense significance in modern television, as it demands good filming, representation of the image/visuals and graphics, which acts as an eye-ball contact for the viewers.*

According to New Producer of Regional News Unit at Guwahati, *Doordarshan News*:

*DD News basically focuses on information and entertainment and develops programs so as to spread knowledge and awareness among the common people about government schemes and facilities and how can they benefit from them. Especially our focus at DD Northeast is on traditional ethnic cultures, customs, functions occasions, resemblances and similarities of all of these with those of the region beyond boundaries. Our motto is to educate the people in healthy way and entertain.*

**Consumer demand:** Another 21% respondents (Figure 3.1) said that catering to the demands of the target audience is another most important factor that determines the programming procedure. Right from identifying the target which is a large group of people, understanding their media wants and delivering according to their media gratification, research and typically preconceived notions go behind the programming. Mostly market research is carried on to determine the likeability, readership or viewing preferences of the populace being catered to. Knowing the information needs, meeting consumers’ expectations and delivering accordingly is one important strategy that producers employ to attract consumers and hold them. Usually all content selection is done keeping in mind that the consumers are practically looking for entertainment and information clubbed together, ‘infotainment’ with more of

entertainment. “Studies have proved that content and quality of news are greatly affected by audience demands” (Althaus et al. 2009; Arnold 2004; Dunaway 2008; Dunaway 2012; Hamilton 2004; MsDonald and Lin 2004; Powers 2001; Zaller 1998). Selective responses by media practitioners of the region reflecting similar views are given below:

According to Producer News, News and Current affairs channel:

*While ideation of a programme is done the objective and target audience should be well defined. This helps to work more precisely on the key elements such as concept, content, script, location etc. Attractiveness of a programme depends on extent the audience is able to identify with it and is absorbed.*

According to Producer News, regional news channel:

*It should be more oriented towards a particular group of people. Example youth, adult, women etc. Then it becomes easy to develop programmes according to the target groups’ interests and requirements.*

**Presentation:** 19% respondents (Figure 3.1) point at presentation to be another major policy that media practitioners employ to cater to consumerism. Innovative presentation styles are being constantly worked upon in media industry. Many believe ‘loud and unique’ presentation style attracts audiences. Notably one respondent refereeing to a national media television news channel and being a former employee of the particular media house said that “more the programme presentation style was loud and people found it weirdly strident, more they would watch it only for entertainment and not for information collection”. The attractiveness, aesthetic sense and innovative way of holding on to audiences to a media reports may be apparently clubbed as media presentation as a whole.

Echoing what Hamilton points out in his work, respondents from the television industry seem to believe that “anchors and reporters are promoted as celebrities” (2011: 161). News presenters, reporters and anchors are believed to create an impression about the particular channel as they are considered as the “face of the channel”. Their delivering of information and knowledge about the news, along with visual and graphical aids are key features that attract viewers to a particular news item initially. Especially in *LIVE* situations the reporter and the news presenter are the source of information extraction. In such situations, the presentation design with

interactions, visuals, expert opinions etc form major characteristics which draw audience attention. Similar is the case of print media too, only that the dissimilarity lies in putting all the efforts to writing style only rather than audio-visual style along with content development.

**Packaging:** Another similar aspect like presentation is packaging. Packaging is a criterion that media makers employ to attract people to the particular programme. 12% respondents have pointed at packaging as an important aspect of programming strategy. According to the respondents, this includes *representation of the image/visuals and graphics along with the main content, scheduling space and time slots, distribution of information, details and explanations provided*, etc... along with content selection, storyline development, supporting visuals or images, experts' views and opinions on the subject if are to be included, format of the programme- either recorded or *Live*, interactivity of the programme- audience polls or phone- ins etc; all form aspects of packaging, which media houses wisely employ to attract consumers towards the media product.

According to a news producer at a television news channel:

*Presentation is important but packaging is the overall basic requirement of the entire programming. Not only content wise but the whole decoration around the information to be disseminated, and ofcourse the complete presentation becomes equally important for attracting people towards any particular programme.*

**Objective:** A well-defined objective of the particular programme was pointed by 8% respondents (Figure 3.1) as a major strategic plan which needs to be accomplished before production and final release. As per majority of the respondents, to communicate with a clearly stated goal in mind, defining the objective of a particular programme requires identifying the target audience, understanding the present media trend and consumer (audience/viewers) preferences; determining the key issues which interest consumers and needs to be addressed and accordingly planning and designing the programme.

As per the respondents defining objectives include identifying the information that needs to be communicated through media, designing it in desired manner, conveying

through proper channel and media in appropriate time and space. This enables finalising the structure of the media product as well.

**Promotion:** 5% respondents (Figure 3.1) identify promotion as a significant programming strategy that is employed by media producers and practitioners to attract consumers to any particular media commodity which mostly for news media is a piece of information and at times series of related information. In creating awareness regarding the media house, focus of the media house, kind and quality of news dealt with are conceptions generated and strengthened to attract audiences. As per the respondents promotion of a particular programme need to highlight its USP (Unique Selling Point). Promotional videos or media house promotions, work well for attracting the audience towards the media house and its products and gradually creating a niche for the brand among the consumers. Apparently good public relation by the organisation proper advertising helps in promoting.

According to the News Editor of a regional television news channel:

*Highlight the Unique Selling Point (USP) of a particular programme or channel in an attractive and convincing manner. In case of news channels or newspaper one has to put across the message of the particular channel/ newspaper being the best at breaking news, in exclusive stories, in-depth stories and analysis, off beat stories, at representing people at authoritative platforms; either or all of them. Even single news items may be provided a USP and marketed accordingly to attract viewers.*

According to a television programme producer:

*Some of the strategies employed to attract the people include interesting promos, mentioning the name of the particular program in some other programs, loud or unique presentation style, roping in celebrity anchors and so on.*

**Sensationalism:** Media has been of late criticised of deploying sensational features into media content for attracting viewers/ readers. 8% respondents (Figure 3.1) pointed towards sensationalism as a key strategy to increase consumerism. But it was eventually seen that definition and degree of sensationalism varies from person to person. While most of the media houses clarify a certain kind of excessive depiction or a certain presentation or packaging style as exploring reality on their own part, rest label it as sensationalising of facts for certain organisational or individual gains mostly with inlaid intentions of profit making.

According to Senior Copy Editor of a vernacular language press of Assam:

*Deploying sensationalism has become the easy and widely employed approach in media to attract readers/viewers and retaining them. Sensationalism prevails in many ways in today's media; right from selection of subject matter, triviality over-hyped treatment, misrepresentations and exaggerations of details, and so on. We do realise being part of the media industry that most of the news making headlines and breaking slots in newspapers and televisions respectively have very less news worthiness.*

**Authenticity:** 3% respondents (Figure 3.1) pointed at authenticity of the information given through a particular programme or media as the chief feature which attracts and holds on to media consumers. Information in its purest forms without distortions and twisting of facts is found by few respondents to sustain readership/ viewership in the long run.

According to Senior Assistant Editor of a national newspaper's Guwahati edition:

*The best strategy to attract readers and retain them is to deliver the news in its purest form. Authenticity and faith goes a long way in media and readers retention. Sensationalism is temporary winner in the industry. Audiences are intelligent these days and they know to distinguish between fake and real. Unnecessary overloading of information is not the key to success, Authenticity is. However the presentation matters a lot too.*

### **3.2.2 Content Selection Criteria/Rule Book**

Content is apparently the most important aspect manoeuvred to determine and establish the end product capable of attracting media consumers. Noteworthy is the fact that in media content is not kept limited to information being provided to the end-users, it apparently encompasses the entire experience of the mediated information gathering through media in specific contexts. Therefore the need is felt to understand features of the media content in broader perspectives to be able to analyse the intensions that go behind content selection in media.

The responses (Figure 3.2) on existence of content selection criteria/rule-book and its chief features may be categorised as below:

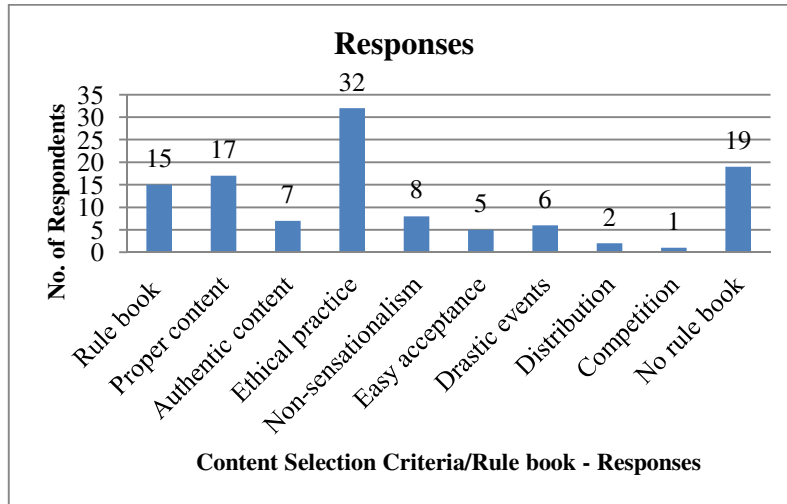


Figure 3.2: Responses on Existence of Content Selection Criteria and its Chief Features

A majority of 83% of respondents (Figure 3.2) agreed to the existence of some kind of a rule book but not in a definite form. They emphasised upon certain unsaid rules that are followed regarding content selection by individuals and organisations, whereas remaining 17% respondents (Figure 3.2) were apparently unaware of any such convention specifically laid down by authorities and thus followed. Only 13% respondents (Figure 3.2) agree to the existence of a media content selection rule book though not in a definite form. Whereas 17% did not respond distinctively upon having a rule book in any format, believed no content selection criteria exists and in the absence of a proper rule book media makers are free to decide for themselves, select and represent according to their wishes; the remaining 70% (a total of 78 of 112 respondents) have pointed at various specific points which illustrate the features one tries to figure out in a piece of information to make it into a media product believing that it would attract media consumers, satisfy their wants and needs form the particular media product, and as a result deliver the desired consequence of selling a media product and making profits out of it in this highly commercialised media industry.

**Rule book:** 13% respondents (Figure 3.2) were of the opinion that a media rule book, though not in a definitive form, exists for deciding upon media content. Respondents who believe that certain internal guidelines regarding content selection which varies from organisation to organization do exist also said that these are crucial for media

functioning as depending on these only information is presented to the masses for consumption.

Reflecting the above was the response by News-coordinator of a regional television news channel:

*There is always a rule book, though it doesn't need to be in a definite form. The main features in every news item should be to deliver the information as it happens and not to comment or judge on it. Let the reader/viewer decide and take their call.*

According to CEO & Content Editor of a television news channel based in Guwahati:

*There is no distinctive rule book for content selection or its reproduction and broadcast but definitely we have editorial policy under which we have set our priorities and what will be our basis of content selection and its broadcast.*

Certain editorial policies though are known to set the priorities regarding content and presentation, respondents opined that because of the indecisive nature of the informative guidelines and criteria, the knowledge and implementation also varies among the media practitioners.

According to Assam correspondent of a national television news channel:

*Media ethics are ofcourse there but how much of it is followed depends on individuals and media organizations. Most of the so called rules which were supposed to be abided by are nowadays forgotten.*

According to Assam correspondent of a national newspaper with Guwahati edition:

*There are no rule books for media content. While we stay away from showing gory pictures, faces of victims (based on the situation), we generally deviate from set norms when there's a major development something that changes the course of news on a totally different basis.*

Probably the chief features of the selection criteria were pointed out by two respondents to the best in their brief response. According to the freelance journalist the chief features of the non-distinctive rule book regarding content selection are as follows:

- *Media has to check and cross check data before bringing it to the public*
- *Media has to act responsibly and not malign names of Government/ or anybody only for the sake of more TRPs and circulation figures.*
- *Media should give more news and lesser views.*
- *Media should not be judgmental*
- *Media reporting should not be partial towards a particular party and biased towards others*
- *Media should restrain from yellow journalism.*

- *Media should not be a part of the crab mentality.*
- *Should take oath before starting their career like doctor's Hippocratic Oath*

According to a Senior News Producer from a regional television channel:

*We don't have a rule-book. But we have certain specific guidelines which include practicing free and fair journalism, ethical practice, avoiding the unprofessional practices of yellow & cheque-book journalism and sensationalism, avoiding coverage or events which are distasteful and unhealthy for public viewing and against peaceful living & tolerance."*

Of the respondents who opined about the chief features of the guidelines that dictate the message selection for mass communication through media include employing ethical practices 29% (32 respondents), appropriate content selection for communication 15% (17 respondents), authentic content 6% (7 respondents), non-sensationalism 7% (8 respondents) easy acceptability 6% (5 respondents), drastic events 5% (6 respondents), distribution 2% (2 respondents) and competition content 1% (1 respondent).

**Ethical practice:** This was pointed out by 29% respondents (Figure 3.2) to be the chief feature of media communication. Ethical practice in journalism was unanimously identified as a key feature which needs to be employed in producing any media content, but different respondents had a different highlight of what is considered ethical. Practicing free and fair journalism is said to be the most important factor by respondents which means avoiding yellow and cheque-book journalism. Being non-judgemental in reporting was seen as another important aspect of the selection criteria of media content in ethically practicing journalism. This includes presenting the information to the audience but not commenting on it, especially on sensitive issues, which might be seen as disrupting normalcy. Communal issues, religious issues etc. are to be handled carefully while representing in media. Employing ethical practice in journalism includes avoid anything that may be considered potential enough to disrupt social balance, peaceful living or is against national interest. Vulgarity and obscenity check is essential in creating a media product and releasing it for the masses. Some responses which reflect the above views are given below:

According to Managing Editor of a regional news channel:

*Messages communicated through media, is selected on the basis that it does not disrupt peaceful living or disrupt the social balance and does not portray anything against national interest. Rest all the audience and government can handle seeing on television.*

News Producer of Regional News Unit, *Doordarshan Northeast* stated:

*We are not biased. We do not exaggerate reports like private media houses. As we are the national broadcaster of the nation and not a profit driven organisation, we do not require to unnecessarily draw attention of viewers with flared up information or respond to dictates of the advertisers. For us authenticity, non- sensationalisation and rationality works. Our motto is to educate inform and entertain in the way culture accepts it.*

According to respondents another sensitive issue regarding content selection in media is dealing with violence and victims. Anonymity of victims and perpetrators of violence at times may result in limiting and preventing a lot of further conflicts.

According to Sub-editor of regional English language newspaper:

*Yes, we avoid mentioning names of victims of rape cases, or cases where exposure would in some way affect the victim or victim's family, anything against our national interest that threatens to disrupt the social balance. Gory pictures and over sensationalizing of any particular news item is kept away. At least, we in print media strictly avoid projecting direct images of violence and distasteful descriptions.*

**Non-sensationalism:** 7% respondents (Figure 3.2) emphasised on avoiding over-sensationalising of stories as an essential rule to be followed unconditionally by media houses in deciding upon content and representation. Out of the eight respondents five cited that direct sensationalised depiction of violence is distasteful media practice and unhealthy for public viewing. Noteworthy is the fact that all respondents who expressed views against depiction of violence and sensationalising information pointed that the print media though was in a way able to maintain the decree to some extent; electronic media was beyond control, regulation and repair.

Reflecting the above views, Resident Editor of a national newspaper, published from Guwahati for the entire Northeast said:

*Especially for print media the selection and omission of pictorial depiction of sensational, disturbing images is taken care of. But television does not follow any rule, everything is broadcasted irrespective of the impact it may have on the society and people.*

**Drastic events:** 5% respondents (Figure 3.2) reflected upon on major incidents and certain burning issues from the region which are always given priority in news.

According to respondents' extensive coverage, time and space is provided to information belonging to this category of media content, irrespective of these depictions posing threat to the society or contradicting with the editorial policies or widely accepted representation rules by media. Extremity of an event, in its exposure and impact brings it under media scanner and thus gets transformed in media content. According to Senior Copy Editor of an English language newspaper of the region with national circulation opined that:

*The thrust is usually on illegal migration from Bangladesh and ofcourse terrorism afflicting the region, as these are considered to be the major issues troubling the entire region as well as the nation. Environmental issues in Northeast also gain media attention especially when conflicts or agitations are fuelled or it poses threat to life.*

**Easy acceptance:** 4% of respondents (Figure 3.2) pointed out that information expected to be easily acceptable to a larger section of audience is considered appropriate media content. In this the target audience plays a very significant role in deciding what the media content should be and how it should be portrayed to draw maximum attention, viewership or readership.

According to Senior Correspondent and News Editor of a Regional News channel (also reporting for a national news channel):

*Most of the programs and the content are based on surveys of specific areas and market research. The survey results determine the target audience and also what the target group wants from the media. According we plan and design our content for easy acceptance. Usually we provide what they want from us, the way they want it.*

**Distribution:** Distribution was mentioned by 2% of respondents (Figure 3.2) as important for content selection and development. According to them space and time allocation of a content has a lot of impact on its acceptance. Thus directing the right message to the right people, at the right time in the right environment is what the media planners target for proper distribution of time and space in media.

**Competition content:** Though only 1% respondents blatantly stated competition content is a decisive factor for determining content, almost all respondents echoed similar views when confronted on the issue. The main subject matter of the programme (news) is often a picked-up one for most media houses, especially regarding violence. Initially a single media outlet breaks the news and the rest simply

follow the topic, replicating and adding on details. But again most of the respondents pointed at variation in treatment of the same story by various media houses.

Regarding rule book of media an interesting point that emerged was that The Associated Press Stylebook (AP stylebook) is universally considered as a standard for the newspaper industry and has also been started to be used by magazines and broadcasters extensively in representation. But surprisingly no print media respondents interviewed mention about it. This confirms not only the lack of specific knowledge but also points at the unawareness of the media practitioners of the region regarding any kind of conventional practices followed by the greater media fraternity. Only one respondent from the television media, who believed that no rule book for content selection was followed by his respective media house mentioned about it as:

*Though most of the media organisation follow AP style book, but in our channel there is no style book or rule-book that is followed.*

### **3.2.3 Norms for Representation of Violent Content**

Many believe that the commercial attitude towards programming and content development has escalated the representation of violence in media, which is not in accordance to socially accepted norms and thus do not meet the established universally accepted ethical standards. As far as representation of violence is concerned the major issue confronted by journalists and media practitioners is that how much of violence is to be represented and in what manner. While a section believes representing violence is mandatory on media part so as to inform its audiences about the society, another section believes in following certain guidelines in representing violence so as to not disrupt socio-political settings and hurt human emotions. But majority of respondents believe that irrespective of having internal editorial representational policies regarding violent content, less is rigidly followed. Individual and organisational commercial motive acts as the basic reason for exploiting violence for certain gains. As revealed by respondents the run for profits which technically translates into TRPs (Television Rating Points) for electronic media or circulation numbers for newspapers, is responsible for dealing with violence in a particular manner.

The responses (Figure 3.3) on media norms for representation of violent content may be categorised as below:

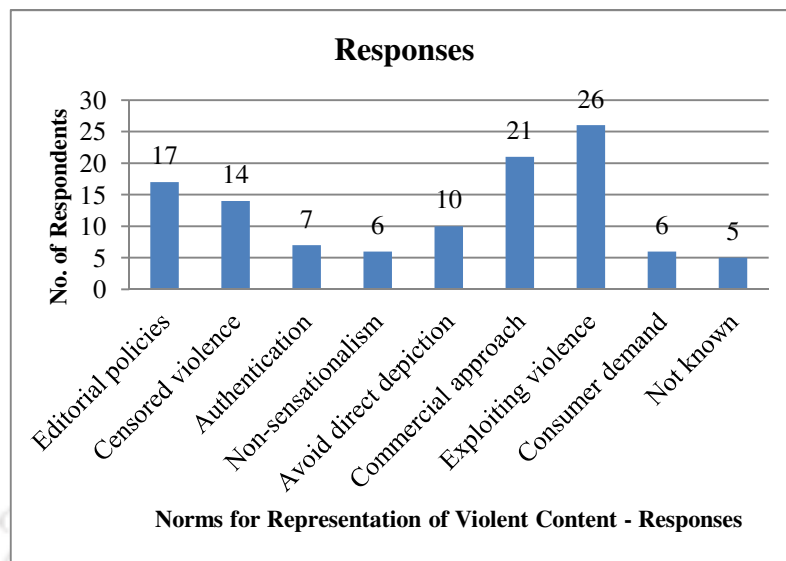


Figure 3.3: Responses on Media Norms for Representation of Violent Content

**Editorial policies:** 15% respondents (Figure 3.3) agree that certain unsaid universally accepted norms, organizational rule book and guidelines do exist though not in a definitive form, which are adhered to during representation of violence.

According to a Senior Copy Editor of an English language Newspaper:

*Everyone follows their own rule-book or guidelines when it comes to representation of violence. However, it is the constant endeavour of most media professionals/houses to act as gate-keepers by censoring events or projections of violent acts... Internal editorial policies regarding representation of violent contents through the newspaper are followed in our organisation.*

**Censored violence:** 13% respondents believe that violence may be censored by media in order to keep the negative impact of the representation on its audiences minimal. Editing techniques and special effects are applied to avoid direct depiction of visuals, where the message can be put across but disturbing visuals are not put forward for show, opined especially the electronic media respondents. On the other hand the respondents with print media associations declared that violent imageries were kept out of publications. As censorship in terms of content mostly is associated with excessive violence depiction in media, but the problem lies with defining the parameters of extremity related to consumption ability and acceptance.

According to News Producer, Assamese bulletin of a regional news channel:

*We try our best not to show those elements which would trigger some kind of apprehensions in the minds of the viewers. Blood, gore and other disturbing images are blurred as are those of victims of rape, even violent utterances are censored.*

**According to Anchor and Desk Editor of a regional news channel:**

*Attempts are made to avoid those media content which depict any form of violence directly or indirectly. These include violence through text, words or any visual elements like blood. We try our best not to show those elements which would trigger some kind of apprehensions in the minds of the viewers.*

**According to Reporter (Crime) of a regional television news channel:**

*Excessive violent content is strictly kept out of programming and not allowed to be aired, because violence can impact the impressionable young minds and cause unrest in society. In news content where violence has to be reported, efforts are made not to make the depiction graphical. Blurring of images is resorted to when necessary, so that the message is put across but unpleasant images are not.*

**Authentication:** One of the primary norms of representation of violence includes authentication of facts before releasing it for the audiences, opined 6% (Figure 3.3) of the respondents. Selective responses reflecting similar views are presented below:

**According to News Producer of a regional television news channel:**

*Any information about violence, especially mass violence or collective violence should be well researched along with its background before releasing it to the masses.*

**According to Editor of a Vernacular language newspaper:**

*Violence news should be credible and accurate when being communicated through media for a larger section of audience. Retainment of the originality of the story is a must while dealing with violent media content. There should not be any exaggeration of violence. Representation should be truthful to the actual to avoid misrepresentation.*

**According to Reporter of a regional television news channel:**

*Most of the media houses and reporters follow certain norms; such as not to show the gory details or pictures; moreover not to instigate the people while showcasing the communal violence, ethnic clashes, religious violence etc. Regarding depiction of violence in media it is an unsaid norm to demoralise elements of violence and not glorify violence in any means. Objective and authentic reporting of violence and avoiding misrepresentation is a must for all practicing journalists.*

According to Assistant Producer (English News) of a regional television news channel:

*The common ones such as no gore and blood to be shown, face of victims to be blurred, taking care that the news item itself does not incite more violence.*

Similar views emerge out of following response by Producer/ Anchor of a regional television news channel:

*The common ones such as no gore and blood to be shown, face of victims to be blurred, taking care that the news item itself does not incite more violence.*

**Non sensationalism:** Maintaining the authenticity of the content represented in media also means not over emphasising any piece of information, no editorial bias of any kind; non-sensationalising message. 5% respondents (Figure 3.3) opined that non sensationalising violence was a norm followed by media houses. This was much in contradiction to majority of the responses received on the issue that claimed media-regional as well as national, English language as well as vernacular language, newspaper and television, all see violence as an encashing element which is extensively exploited to forward monetary gains in forms of TRPs or circulation figures.

According to Sub-editor of a regional English language newspaper:

*We limit our news only to the facts instead of sensationalising it. Avoid giving pictures of dead bodies or any gory pictures.*

**Avoid direct depiction:** According to 9% respondents (Figure 3.3) direct depiction of violence is strictly avoided in media. Whereas print media asserted that excessive violence depicting images were omitted out, television respondents pointed at use of editing techniques and special effects are deployed to distort violent images from keeping its impact on viewers minimal.

According to Assistant Editor of vernacular (Assamese) language news bulletins in a regional television news channel:

*To make sure that any representation in news does not incite more violence or escalate negativity among viewers, efforts are made not to make the representation more graphical so as to re-create strong violent images.*

According to Production Engineer of a news channel based in Guwahati:

*Excessive violent content is strictly kept out of programming. Whenever depiction is mandatory to put across the message, we use editing tools and special effects such as blurs, etc. to reduce ill-effect on viewers.*

**Commercial approach and exploiting violence:** Whereas 19% respondents (Figure 3.3) hint at the commercial approach in media industry has lead to the present scenario where no particular norms are followed in representation of violence, 23% respondents (Figure 3.3) distinctively point at media's tendency of exploiting violence for various reasons and motives. As violent content always sells in media, it is given priority.

According to few decision makers of a media industry in Assam:

*Generally, media houses used to decide against publishing gruesome photos of victims or detailed graphic descriptions about the event in gory terms earlier. However, TRP and circulation competitions have changed this reservation.*

*Media house at present tends to overplay the stories related to violence There is exaggeration, repetition and sometimes even attempts are made to draw some conclusion or lead the audience to some particular direction.*

According to Senior Correspondent of a national newspaper covering Assam and Northeast:

*Violent content always sells in media. It's a common perception that violence or crimes are given priority by the media houses. But I believe a huge chunk of the audience or readers want to read or watch such kind of news. Moreover, you can't ignore anything serious even if it is violent or gory.*

According to Editor In Chief of regional news channel in Guwahati:

*While reporting violent content many a time media in Assam forget the basic rule of not disclosing the victim's identity. Also, Media shows more gory images just to make an impact.*

Technically the rule is to avoid direct or excessive representation of violence, but in practice things seem to be a bit different, respondents agree. In newspapers or other forms of printed publication, according to most respondents, the media house and editorial board gets time to select and edit representation of violence in the printed version of media. But the electronic media, the twenty-four hour news channels which constantly look for news and have a tendency to show visuals at the earliest, no matter how disturbing or distasteful they are, have little time and responsibility to decide, select, edit or omit violent visuals.

Respondents from electronic media opine:

*At Frontier TV, we ensure that while we air content, which has visuals of violence, it is censored; edited and necessary blurs are given, so that it is not misrepresented. We take extra care in writing the timing of the visuals, location and also give the date. So that the audience, don't feel that the content is fresh, as and when it is aired. Of course, it is not the case, when we air some violent content LIVE. But care is always taken, so that the issue is not blown out of proportion. We cross-check facts and origin of the content before it is actually aired. As sensitive content can do more damage than TRPs, for which all TV channels across the country are running. It is the race of TRPs. But for us, we don't go by this line. For us credible and accuracy does matter. Be late, but correct!*

**Audience/ consumer demand:** 5% respondents (Figure 3.3) pointed at audience demand being the driving force for representation of violence in media and so no particular norm is followed while representing violence.

According to a Northeast correspondent of a newspaper with national circulation:

*The only norm that works behind the detailed description of violence is keeping in tune with the demands of the readers. Surviving in this competitive media world is difficult especially when the competition is with the electronic media with no time and space confinements. Thus to serve our readers with what they want from our newspaper we have to explore violent frontiers. Keeping check on violence representation would be limiting out scope.*

According to a Northeast correspondent of a regional news channel:

*Media is mostly blamed for exploitive representation of violence. It is true that we do not follow any particular norm for representation of violence but it is our duty to inform people about the real situation from the field and we do exactly that. And moreover we do not create violence, we cover violence. More than any other information about the region, people want to know about violence and safety.*

**Not known:** Out of all the 112 respondents, 4% respondents (Figure 3.3) were found to be completely oblivious about any norms that are followed individually or by the media house for representation of violent content. All of the five respondents were journalists from vernacular language media. According to them, no norms are followed in representing violence and are represented as it is without much concern about its impact or threat.

The media makers also feel that violent content is widely and well accepted by the media consumers. Market research is said to be a major factor in determining

information selection, treatment and projection in media and as per the market requirements and preferences and understanding level of its consumers, media designs certain program strategies. Going by the existing media trend of selling media content inevitably, and popularity and acceptance of violence by a larger section of media consumers violence seems to top the charts. Apparently all respondents seem to be aware about ill-effects and massive impact violence representation may have on its audiences and society as a whole. From whatever most respondents expressed against representation of violence in media it was more of what ought to be situation and not practically followed one. In practice they (all respondents, media practitioners) give in to commercial attitude of the profit driven industry of media. And as the popular belief and practice in media suggests violence is known to attract consumers and retain them. Many believe avoiding direct depiction is a rule and unsaid norm suppose to be followed, but the commercial approach is found to have changed all reservations regarding direct depiction of violence and norms for representation of violent content in news.

On the contrary to what most respondents from the print media (news papers and magazines) opined about keeping excessive violent images out of print, it is often seen that potent images of violence with strong inbuilt messages do appear on newspapers and more often on first page lead stories. While *The Telegraph* cover photo tries to depict the blast without showing people directly (see Image 1) the huge impact of massacres are portrayed in the cover pages of the magazines (see Image 11, 12). Similarly instances of collective violence are represented showing consequential images and visuals to depict the magnitude of violence without publishing direct images (see Image 2) or by showing violence directly while in occurrence (see Image 3, 4). The understood representation of gender related violence has always been concerned in concealing the victim's identity being. Almost all media practitioners mostly belonging to the print media were against revealing victims' identity and pointed at utmost care being taken in representations of sensitive issues such as gender related violence. But in practice instances are found where though some element of concealment and camouflage is present there is no step taken towards safeguarding the victim from public gaze (see Image 25, 26). More so in relation to violence where all images are legitimised and work as evidence and in support of the

news story. The regional print media houses are seen violating norms of violence representation of violence with direct on site images and portraying sufferings and victims blatantly (see Image 28). These undoubtedly may be said to be portrayal of violence for attracting onlookers' attention and gaining readership in the process.

### 3.2.4 Representation in Media

Representation in a way is process of constructing meanings and re-presenting them. And in the process of representations in media, the presentation of people, events and ideas are done through media texts. Thus it can be said that representation usually relates to representation of the reality in media, through mediated texts. These media texts are combined reflection of the opinions of the people responsible for the representation, the reaction of the individual (media consumers) to the representation and the most importantly, the context (society, circumstances, beliefs, expectations and understandings) in which the representation is taking place. While answering to what representation in media implies to them, media respondents almost gave similar views but with varied terminologies with slightly different perspectives for representation implementation.

The responses (Figure 3.4) on Implication of Representation in Media may be categorised as below:

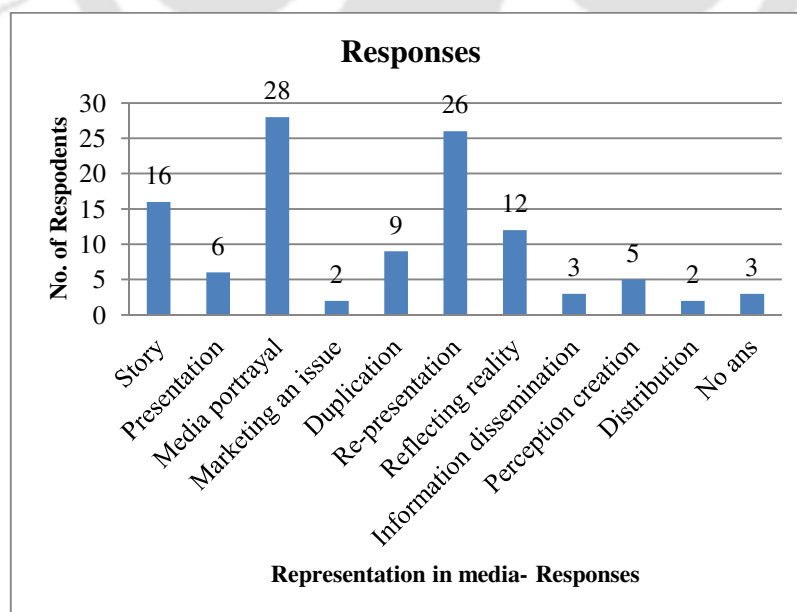


Figure 3.4: Responses on Implication of Representation in Media

**Story:** 14% respondents (Figure 3.4) say that according to them media correspondence to an issue is ‘media representation’. It is the story or the content being referred to as the story idea, media projection, story angle, news story. 50% of these media practitioners (eight of the 16 respondents) emphasise on content, to be the significant feature of the media story being represented. As per the Article 19 report (2003) “the inclusion or exclusion of contextual information, the emphasis of one element of a situation over another and the selection of sources all determine the angle taken on a particular story and ultimately, the impression it makes on the reader or viewer”; the decisive choices lie with the reporters and editors on creating a story out of any given subject matter. Similarly according to respondents, what and how media perceives regarding an issue or event and eventually through representation makes viewer perceive builds the story in media. Apparently according to respondents a story should provide complete information and equal exposure to all sections.

**Presentation:** 5% respondents (Figure 3.4) point at presenting a piece of information through media implying representation in media. As pointed out earlier by respondents presentation being one of the strategies employed to attract media consumers to the media product (section 3.2.1), in regard to representation in media, media makers apply the programming strategy of presentation to communicate through media. As reflected in the earlier responses presentation of a particular story would include the information, texts, visuals, audio, graphics, human presenter, programme design- everything that culminates into the intended message to be transmitted to the prospective media consumers.

According to Senior Copy Editor of a regional newspaper organisation:

*Representation means the way of projecting or presenting a character/photo, incident or event, in the news story/article or the manner of giving an angle to the entire story itself.*

**Media portrayal:** 25% respondents (Figure 3.4) interviewed refer to media portrayal as representation in media. Media portrayal, opined respondents, implies characterisations or personification of real life incidents, situations, people or places.

According to News coordinator of a regional television news channel:

*It implies the portrayal of an issue by the media, presentation, line of thought, words and images used, the various points highlighted of that particular issue.*

According to Producer (Hindi News) of a regional television Channel:

*It is how media/ media house characterises/portrays an issue considering its requirement, priorities, inclination (political etc) and incorporating the elements supplementing its motive.*

According to Copy Editor of an English language Newspaper:

*Representation in media is the ways in which the media portrays particular groups, communities, experiences, ideas, or topics from a particular ideological or value perspective.*

**Marketing an issue:** 2% respondents (Figure 3.4) interviewed, said that representation in media refers to marketing of an issue by the media, which implies imitating the market behaviour of any other consumer product and accordingly supplying goods and services to the consumers and also preparing the target group to accept certain kind of goods and services. Apparently media makers produce homogeneous media content to attract audiences (viewers/readers) and further commercial gains. In the process the media practitioners intend to communicate to the masses real life situations, events, people and region in most acceptable and desired manner.

**Duplication of the original:** 8% respondents (Figure 3.4) point at representation in media as mere duplication of the real world happenings.

According to News Producer (English news) at a regional television news channel:

*For me representation means duplication of the original. Here comes the question of how we want to represent a particular item or news item. In media representation would imply how a particular group, item, thing, events, culture etc. gets its shape. Every media house has its own way of representing the content for presenting them to the audiences in the best attractive manner.*

**Reflecting reality:** 11% respondents (Figure 3.4) refer to representation in media is reality put forward through media texts. Therefore the media texts are texts mirroring the society, reflecting reality. Reflecting reality, as per respondents does not limit itself to reflecting the in time happenings, it also refers to picking up the perceptions of the people and accordingly placing the events in media texts, so as to acknowledge the existing concept truth according to the perceptions that have been harvested for long. Respondents feel that representation which is not in accordance with the popular perceptions are rejected by the target audience as unrealistic. Thus the representations

in media are not mere reflection of reality but more appropriately reflecting reality perceptions.

According to a freelance journalist who reports for Assam from Mumbai:

*The news media (print as well as electronic) is called the 'mirror of the society' and hence representation would imply putting across news, views and opinions of members of society for the consumption of the readers.*

**'Re-presentation':** 23% respondents (Figure 3.4) interviewed referred to the literal meaning of the word re- presentation in media of the real life situations. Apparently in many instances the widespread knowledge of people, places, situations and events are by products of these media representations.

According to Desk Editor of a regional English language newspaper:

*It is a tricky concept, if you look at how it says 're-presentation' which in itself implies that certain ideas and points of views of the particular media gets mingled in bringing forth a certain event or incident, as opposed to presentation ... which then again would mean the usual debate between news and views.*

According to Bureau Chief, International Multimedia News Agency:

*Representation in media implies either material that represents specific needs, aspirations, thoughts and opinions of a particular group or community or content that caters to the taste of individual of different age groups.*

According to a respondent from television media:

*It simply means how you represent yourself and how you show your content. Every channel may have the same content but its representation is important, which means how you play up the story and present it to your audience. As you understand television is increasingly watched by all sections of society, sometimes it becomes difficult to understand your target audience for news, so the situation demands that we as a responsible media house, try our best to show news in a way that does not hurt sentiments, incite hate, anger or jealousy.*

**Information dissemination:** The process of information dissemination through media was pointed out by 3% respondents (Figure 3.4) interviewed as implication of representation of violence. Respondents also point at the media's responsibility towards society of indiscriminately informing. Regarding this responsibility, media makers have the liberty to decide what the consumers are entitled to know and what they are not. This self liberty of the media enables the decision makers in media holding positions to select, filter, edit and represent content accordingly.

Reflecting the above view was the response by a Freelance journalist from Assam:

*'Representation in Media' simply means voicing the issues and causes affecting the masses, individual, group, organization as a mouthpiece irrespective of any discrimination or difference.*

**Creating perceptions:** Representation, according to 4% respondents (Figure 3.4), implies creating perceptions by media. They opined "representation in media" suggests what and how media perceives of any particular event, incident, place or people, and subsequently makes the consumers (viewer/ readers) perceive.

According to News coordinator of a regional television news channel:

*For me being in the media holds a great responsibility towards the society. Though the idea of bringing change in the contemporary world is a big challenge but why not try it by doing some small part from my own end.*

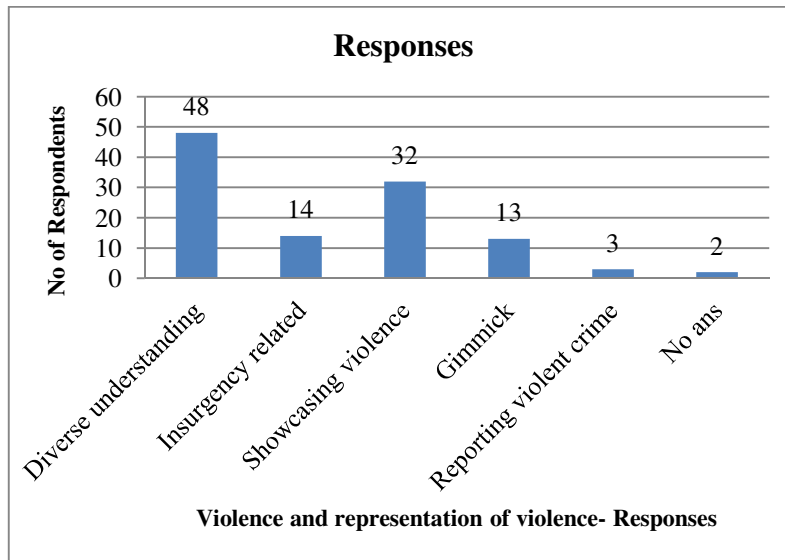
**Distribution:** Space and time allocation in media was pointed by 2% respondents (Figure 3.4) as representation in media. This includes employing strategies in programmes and print reports in the best possible scope of attracting and retaining audiences/ readers. These strategies are employed to deliver to audiences' demands and in turn deliver audiences to advertisers in the composition that makes their advertising most likely to be effective (Ellis 136).

It was observed from the responses that representation in media is apparently the process by which representations of real life incidents are made to appear believable and acceptable as real to the media consumers. The perception of the media practitioners was primarily found to be the concern that the media product should resemble reality so much so that the audience get the real feel to the reportage and undergo emotional extremes to want to consume more of similar products.

### **3.2.5 Violence and Representation of Violence**

Violence as a term is not definitively definable, and thus representation of violence in media broadly is based upon the media makers' understanding of violence.

The responses (Figure 3.5) on understanding of violence and representation of violence may be categorised as below:



**Figure 3.5: Responses on Understanding Violence and Representation of Violence**

A major percentage of respondents clearly show a lack of knowledge and understanding of clearly defining violence. On a broader aspect responding media practitioners revealed understanding of violence and representation according to the followed media rule of their respective organisation. Wide range of forms of violence represented in media, cited by respondents, include acts of terrorism, gender abuse, riots of any kind, protests leading to disruption of law and order, assaults, hooliganism, fights, police firings etc. which may be broadly categorised under insurgency related violence, domestic violence, wildlife and cybercrimes.

**Diverse understanding:** 43% of respondents (Figure 3.5) revealed a wide range of understanding of violence ranging from physical hostility to mental damage propelled individual or any group. Below are some specific responses which describe the understanding of violence of respondents from the media:

According to Producer (News) of a regional television news channel:

*Violence can take the form of physical, mental, verbal. It is some kind of aggression which could affect people to either behave or affect the behaviour of the normal persons.*

According to Assistant Producer (English News) of a television channel:

*Violence shall be use of physical force to hurt someone and its representation would be how that act of violence and its impact and its various reasons are described or depicted.*

According to Producer regional television news channel:

*Violence is a situation that basically involves penetration in comfort zone (in any format) of anyone, a community, a group, a class of people or any other; and therefore arising of difference of opinion and even combat.*

According to Desk Editor and Feature writer of an English language newspaper:

*Any activity that goes against the social or legal code of justice can be violence – ranging from the usual murder, rape and arson to the more subtle forms like mental abuse and child labour.*

According to CEO and Content Editor of a regional television news channel:

*An act or an incident which can disturb the social fabric of the society or incite anger, hate, and revenge is best understood as violence. Any incident which can incite communal sentiments or passion is understood as violence too.*

**Showcasing violence:** 29% respondents (Figure 3.5) were of the opinion that representation of violence meant bringing to the knowledge of people acts or incidents of violence through various available media options. In order to inform people, violence is ‘showcased’ in media for its audiences to consume, but mostly the media intention of informing turns into a gimmick to entertain and thus gain popularity. Though respondents agreed that there can be ways of representing violence which basically depends on the representation grounds, for most respondents’ representation of violence apparently should be done in such a manner so as to not further violence or worsen situations for the victims. Representations of violence in media, as per respondents, constitute description or depiction of acts of violence, its impact, causes of violence and various other related issues. These issues of violence or conflict replicated or put for show for the mass media consumers is a matter of concern and debate for media practitioners. Reflecting similar views are few responses selectively given below:

According to Senior Producer of a regional television news channel of Assam:

*Violence can be represented in many forms either in words, texts, and images or sometimes even with gestures etc.*

According to Desk editor of a regional news channel cum correspondent of an international news magazine:

*Representation of violence should be more of a sensible approach, so that the concerned media house’s depiction doesn’t end up making it worse for the victim/victims or worsening the situation beyond control and repair by the authorities and society. It also depends on the nature*

*of crime, what is considered as violence and how is it represented. Proper representation is very essential to serve the purpose of media and also for smooth functioning of the society.*

According to Correspondent of an English language newspaper published from Guwahati:

*Violence or representation of violence implies the coverage of stories associated with crime, disorder or chaos. Representation means coverage of those issues in the national media with equal tenacity.*

According to Copy Editor of an English language newspaper published from Guwahati:

*Representation of violence means how the print & broadcast media describes an event of violence occurrence and presents it to the audience in order to inform, educate or mostly entertain them.*

**Insurgency related:** According to 13% of respondents (Figure 3.5) violence representation is a confined concept related to insurgency. For them representation of violence in media is only limited to representation of instances of violence related to or resultant of insurgency and similar issues.

According to a freelance print journalist, who is also digital blogger and writes extensively on issues pertaining to Assam, Northeast and insurgency:

*It would mean conflict-zones like northeast India, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh and J&K. Most of the states mentioned are suffering from insurgency or Maoists and wherein the state is engaged in either a battle or ceasefire with the insurgent groups.*

**Gimmick:** For 13 respondents' media representation of violence works as a gimmick for attracting consumers and retaining user interest and continued attention. Profit motive, paid media, political motivation individual and organizational gains etc are certain factors that work strong on these representation patterns.

According to Editor of a vernacular language newspaper of Assam:

*It is all about attracting readers/viewers attention in media. Violence is a potent means capable of attracting quick attention. Through representation of violence most of the times media is seen try to inform people only selective angle of the story which will interest media users and also create fear to know more.*

**Reporting violent crime:** 3% respondents' (Figure 3.5) understanding of violence and its representation was apparently limited to reporting of instances of crime, both

in occurrence and its representation.

According to News coordinator of a regional news channel of Assam:

*If you look at the current rise in crime, then violence is and has become a crucial part of TV reporting. We do not encourage violence but if there is news of a violent crime then we tend to cover the story as smoothly as possible.*

According to Editor of a regional vernacular language newspaper:

*Violence of any kind that is portrayed in media, whether censored or uncensored and which can have a profound impact on impressionable young minds is my idea of violence in media. A case in point – the recent ethnic clashes that apparently took place between the Bodos and Muslims community of Assam-where the Muslims were supposedly treated as immigrants in the BTAD areas of Assam. These clashes were reported with alarming exaggeration in local media – especially TV news channels. The repetitive and sensational nature of reporting whipped up communal tension –not only in affected areas but also in the whole state. The interaction between common people in social networking sites such as Facebook showed a rising trend of communal jingoism which can be directly blamed on irresponsible reporting of media.*

### 3.2.6 Representation of Violence in Media

Representation of violence in media is believed to be on constant escalation in the present media scenario. In order to understand what exactly goes behind the prevailing system of representation of violence it becomes essential to understand what is being represented and why. For this the media practitioners' idea of representation of violence is significant.

The responses (Figure 3.6) on understanding of representation of violence in media may be categorised as below:

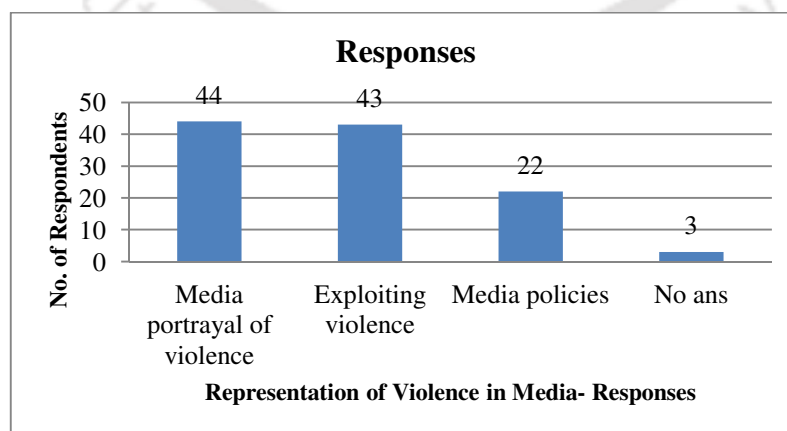


Figure 3.6: Responses on Understanding of Representation of Violence in Media

**Media portrayal of violence:** 39% respondents (Figure 3.6) refer to media portrayal of violence as mere representation of violence in media. Majority of the respondents even justify the direct depiction, apparently over representation, of violence in media by claiming that audiences demand such programmes and thus the designing and content selection is done accordingly. Selective respondents refer to representation of violence as the following:

According to Freelance journalist of Assam:

*Reporting acts or incidents of violence in order draw attention of the concerned authorities so that necessary remedial measures can be taken at the earliest and also primarily to inform the people / masses.*

According to Sub-editor of a regional English language newspaper organisation:

*Coverage of riots, assaults, hooliganism, protests leading to disruption of law and order and all other sorts of violence. Violence among communities or various groups or individuals is treated as good food for media production.*

According to Content Editor of a regional television news channel:

*It is best understood as broadcast, presentation of violent incident, programme or enactment of an incident.*

According to News coordinator of a regional television news channel:

*People want to know about violent crimes happening around the world. We just try to portray what is going on in the society in the best possible manner.*

According to Reporter of a regional television news channel:

*Representation of violence in media refers how various media interpret violence issues through pictures, visuals and language; also its impact in our society.*

According to a freelance journalist working from Northeast:

*Portraying news of conflict -zones like northeast India, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh and J&K. Most of the states mentioned are suffering from insurgency or Maoists and wherein the state is engaged in either a battle or ceasefire with the insurgent groups.*

According to correspondent of an English language newspaper from Guwahati:

*Violence or representation of violence implies the coverage of stories associated with crime, disorder or chaos. Representation means coverage of those issues in the national media with equal tenacity.*

**Exploiting violence:** 38% respondents out of 112 (Figure 3.6) refer to extensive representation of violent content as representation of violence in media. Media

practitioners refer to exploiting violence, the practice of over exposing violent content as a setback to media functioning. Respondents were of the view that media usually engages in showcasing and glorifying violence for its consumers to consume, as showing more violence leads to attracting more audiences and thus violence cannot be ignored.

According to a national English language newspaper Guwahati correspondent:

*It is how the media is presenting any situation, exaggerating even manipulating sometimes. The main problem that lies here is that media is trying to draw conclusions/give decisions in which is not at all what it is supposed to do. It should simply report the incident.*

According to City (Guwahati) correspondent of a regional television channel:

*It is a very broad perspective, but to narrow it down if we just look at the movies that portray violence, it is presented in a very detailed manner. People are made to get attracted to it, it is used as a bait to get the audience's response, either positively or negatively.*

**Media Policies:** 20% respondents (Figure 3.6) directly link representation of violence in media to the organisational media policies. The media policies of the media houses is found to be responsible for deciding the way violent content is to be handled by the media, from deciding upon the significance of the story to packaging and presenting it to the audiences accordingly.

According to senior Freelance journalist of the region and also Editor of a current affairs magazine in Assamese language:

*The media house's editorial policy decides the language and angle that is given to a news story. Example, the words used to describe Taliban is different in the western media and the media in Pakistan/ Afghanistan.*

According to Desk editor of a regional television news channel:

*This is the part where the media has to tread the fine line of bringing forth violent occurrences in a fair manner without sensationalism inciting any section unduly, and also not cause any disturbing image to upset the audience.*

According to Desk Editor of a regional television news channel:

*Appropriate representation of violence may be the sensible approach towards reporting of violence so that the concerned media house doesn't end up making it worse for the victims. It also depends on the nature of crime, conflict and situation so as to decide what would be the appropriate way of representation.*

According to Producer (News and Current affairs) of a regional television channel:

*By representation of violence in media more than what is shown it is the question of how something is represented. Media-makers have many choices when it comes to representing an event, or the aftermath of that event. Violent actions can be represented as cool, glamorous, easy, or justified, thus inspiring copycat behaviour. It can include sound effects, images, camera angles, editing amongst other technical elements in its representation.*

According to Reporter/ copy writer of a vernacular language newspaper:

*“Representation of violence” suggests what and how Media perceives violence and presents it to the public.*

According to Producer of a regional television news channel:

*Every media has its own way to represent violence. For print media the visual and the use of word can take the shape of violence. For electronic media like radio the sound forms can instigate a violent content. In television with the smoothing touch of sound and the visuals violence can be represented in the most appropriate manner. Television has more effect on the viewers as the visuals can represent reality in the most appropriate manner. Representation of violence in media today can influence the viewing masses.*

### 3.2.7 Media-houses Covering Violence

It is apparent that there are no set parameters of reporting and representing violence in media (derived in section 3.2.2, 3.2.3). There are under-defined imperatives and intentions behind information accumulation, processing and display in media representations of violence.

The responses (Figure 3.7) on how media houses deal with violence may be categorised as below:

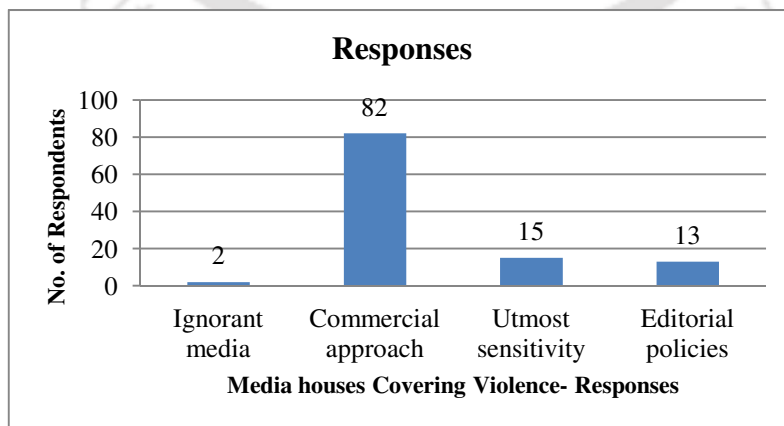


Figure 3.7: Responses on How Media Houses Deal with Violence

Media is often held responsible for exaggerating facts and to blow up information out of proportions in regards to violence. A majority of 73% respondents (Figure 3.7) agree at violence being dealt with by media makers with mostly commercial motive directly or indirectly.

**Media ignorance:** 2% respondents (Figure 3.7) pointed at ignorance of the media in dealing with violence resulting in extensive and exaggerated reporting on violence in media. Apparently the oblivion about the effect the media reports on violence may have on the target consumers is seen as the root cause for media makers engaging in reporting of facts and figures with efficiency in speed reporting but not on validating or authenticating information and understanding ground realities for mass consumption.

According to Production Engineer of a Regional television news channel:

*The media generally don't try to understand the impact of their reporting sometimes, it generally takes such issues as any other daily news by telling the facts without any verification.*

According to Producer (News) of Regional News Unit, DD News:

*Prasar Bharati under broadcasting corporation of India always authenticates reports, situation, events, performance and delivery, before broadcasting. Media in general supposed to look after the public in general; keeping the dignity sovereignty authenticity of the nation. But media houses of private ownership so called "paid channels" sometimes exaggerate the things which are not compound to that capacity. There must be some guidelines, some limitation. If sky is the limit then freedom of speech which is laid down in our constitution should not be exploited or unduly used.*

**Commercial approach:** 73% respondents (Figure 3.7) opine that media persists in its portrayal of violence as the major source of revenue earner. The practice of utilising violent content for overt and covert revenue generation is majorly accepted by the regional media practitioners. Violence is used a source of gaining maximum viewership (TRP) or readership circulation, mostly by sensationalising facts, and rounding up figures. According to the respondents, in this TRP or circulation run, media even at times compromises on its content's authenticity and objectivity, as a result often manipulating or overplaying facts relating to violence. While television channels, according to respondents, are apparently felt to be directly depicting violence (see Image 4, 7, 8, 9) in order to forward commercial gains, newspapers and

other print versions, are comparatively found to be more refrained in direct depiction of violence (see Image 1).

According to Sub-editor, English language newspaper published from Guwahati:

*Media houses are attracted to news of violence and love to cover it as much as possible. Television channels use various camera angle and sound effects to dramatise it.*

According to Editor In Chief, television news channel broadcasted from Assam:

*Media is supposed to represent reality without any distortion of information. But due to various reasons like technological advancements and competitions from rivals' media, every other media has taken up different strategies to hook up the minds of the viewers. Most media houses have taken up violence and its related areas as a means to build their TRP ratings. They try to twist the information to give different flavour. Most of the time these media houses forget that in their effort to dramatizing the information there are common people as the receiving end. Again some media houses use such situation to gain political advantage.*

According to Producer (Assamese news) of a regional news channel broadcasted from Guwahati:

*In present scenario it seems that violence sells and media is seen extensively working to exploit an incident to get more TRP's.*

Desk Editor, of a regional news channel cum English news reader says:

*Many houses lack the understanding of matured dealing of violence. Most see violence representation as an opportunity to play-it-up for viewership, especially television channels.*

According to Correspondent of English language newspaper published from Assam:

*Media houses in general look at violence as a factor that attracts audience attention and at the same time boosts their Television Rating Points. They sometimes deal with violence in a rather insensitive manner and seldom try to come up with anything conclusive in their discussions. They focus more on exclusivity of the story. Violence becomes synonymous to sensationalism and this often retreats the audience who begin to shy away from such news and sometimes do not even react to it with amazement. Too much of exposure to violence makes the audience want to settle down for something soothing to the senses.*

According to regional television news channel Reporter:

*All the media houses put great emphasis on violence issues as it is one of the factors of news which attract viewers and readers. Such violence stories help to get TRP or to increase circulation.*

CEO & Content Editor, of a television news channel with mainstream tie-ups, pointed at the deliberate attempts decision makers in media often make to attract viewers, exploiting violence blatantly, and neglecting information authenticity and validation:

*For most media – Violence is a piece of news that sells. It has emotion and can pull audience, readers and listeners. So as and when such report comes, without even cross-checking facts, we tend to broadcast or sometimes report the event instantly, as media today believes in giving the news first and fast.*

Pointing at different kinds of violence treated differently in media and only some are to be attention grabber compared to others, Staff Correspondent of a Vernacular language newspaper in Assam says:

*Violence seems to be getting more publicity than anything else....however you simply cannot focus on domestic and family violence for ....Violence of terrorism is a different issue.*

**Utmost sensitivity:** 13% respondents (Figure 3.7) opine that violence content is media receives utmost sensitive treatment by media practitioners. Media houses (national & international) give objective recount of any violent incident, as per a section of the respondents, which is opposing to the popular believe and perception about media representations of violence.

According to News Correspondent of a national English language newspaper published with a Guwahati edition:

*Media deals with violence with utmost sensitivity and handles violent content with much care. Though media has no option but to deliver news containing violence but it always tries to avoid the role of fuelling it further.*

According to Desk editor and Feature writer of a regional English language newspaper organisation:

*They do so more or less without much sensation, with satisfactory insights into the roots and results.*

According to News coordinator of a regional television news channel:

*Media houses do not support violence at all. If there is a situation where we need to restrain ourselves from giving adequate coverage to a violent crime we do dat. But there are instances which need extensive media coverage for the overall good of the society*

According to Correspondent of a newspaper published in English in Assam:

*Ethically such incidences are to be informed objectively without supporting any of the parties involved. As citizens deserves the right to know about the cause behind such incidences and so*

*that they are also aware of the dangers (which might affect them or any fellow citizen) and encouraging effort for minimizing of the catalytic factors amplifying such incidences.*

**Editorial policies:** The individual media houses' editorial policies decide the language and angle that are to be given to any news story on whatever subject being covered including violence. 12% respondents (Figure 3.7) hinted at the editorial policies as below:

According to Freelance journalist reporting Assam for Delhi based media houses:

*It depends on each of their editorial policies; but largely they follow their own editorial ethics while reporting violence. Stories only get selected if they fulfil their demands. Thus we accordingly provide story angles suiting their standards and expectations for every media house respectively.*

According to Senior Copy Editor of a regional English language newspaper published from Guwahati:

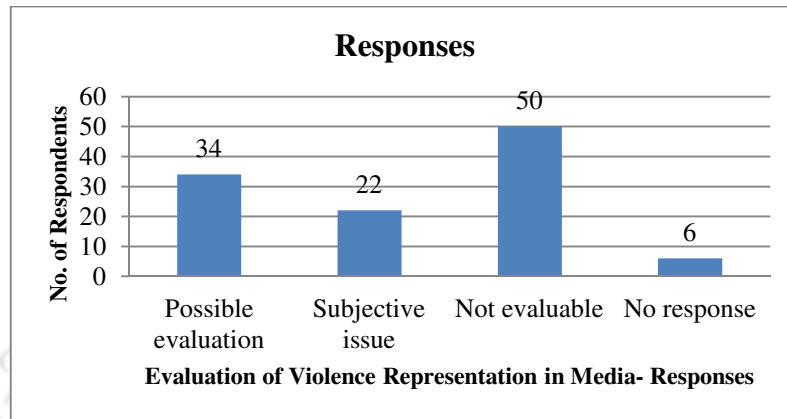
*Violence is being increasingly represented in more macabre graphic and figurative descriptions, mostly by regional English as well as vernacular media, to tap TRPs and readers. The national media has also changed its stance by showing the dead bodies of victims of violence in recent times.*

### **3.2.8 Evaluation of Violence Representation in Media**

Respondents agreed that research and attempted evaluations in various fields of media have been increasing. Whereas many only related the term evaluation to academic and research affairs, some also pronounced the need to incorporate evaluations at industry level as well for improvements and identifying newer scopes in media productions. But there was no mention at all of evaluation being incorporated into daily programming and production procedures so as to reduce the ill effects of representation of violence in media and keep media products suitable for masses. It was found that most of the evaluation studies were attempted academically only with evidence of little or no practical inclusion into the industry. The effects of media violence among consumers, various groups, negative effects of exposure to media violence, risk for aggression among viewers and if media literacy could prevent ill-effects and reduce damage to the society, are usually research carried on at various academic levels across the globe. Basically media preferences and media consumption is studied while analysing consumer behaviour. Impact study is also a

process of evaluating media content through analysing the affects of media consumption on its consumers.

The responses (Figure 3.8) on evaluation of violence representation in media may be categorised as below:



**Figure 3.8: Responses on Evaluation of Violence Representation in Media**

**Possible evaluation:** 30% respondents (Figure 3.8) agree that evaluation of representation of violence in media is possible using certain techniques of evaluation. Out of the 34 respondents, 28 respondents referred to content analysis as a technique useful for evaluating and understanding media texts, rest of the three respondents pointed at opinion polls. Respondents even referred to quantitative evaluation of media reports which basically are numerically segregating media reports based on stories of various categories of violence, affected people etc ad also to some extent in terms of over representing the violence with respect to manipulation of facts and figures.

According to Senior Producer (News), regional television channel:

*Evaluation can easily be done with the help of various research methods like content analysis, survey among the conflict reporter and readers, critical discourse analysis for better understanding of the ideology behind these violence reporting.*

**Not evaluable:** 45% respondents (Figure 3.8) opined that evaluation of representation of violence is not possible. Six out of the respondents opined evaluation of violence representation in media as “tricky affair”.

According to Desk editor of a regional newspaper organization:

*Representation of violence in media can be evaluated, but it is a long road. Firstly, evaluation itself does not necessarily mean correction of the negativities. Secondly, for changes to be made*

*as per the evaluation is an onerous task that few or none will be able to make media houses exercise.*

**Subjective issue:** 20% respondents (Figure 3.8) feel that evaluation of violence represented in media is a subjective issue and depends on the evaluator. While evaluation may subjectively vary from terms of over-representation of the violent content to under-representation of facets of violence, it also depends on the prevalent perceptions of the producer as well as the consumers to comprehend the media text and evaluate accordingly.

According to Producer, regional news channel broadcasted from Guwahati:

*It is a subjective issue. Hence it is indeed difficult to comprehend the same and evaluate in an objective fashion. However, conclusions can be drawn by studying or analysing opinions especially of children and teenagers as they are the one most influenced by such violent content.*

According to Producer (News) of *Doordarshan*, Regional News Unit of Northeast:

*Media is basically performing duties knowing limitations. Exaggerating of facts of violence, while representing in media is like contributing towards the crime- a practice against the law. But there is something called “convention”, not rigid but the ideal and general standard, the principles followed. Conventions have been changing instinctively and gradually. We all have to abide by the “convention” and the “constitution” simultaneously. This is the only reason to solve this problem. Most of the followed practices are taken as conventions. Every person has his own sets of conventions and his own knowledge of the constitution. Violence representation in media, based on these two yardsticks may be evaluated respectively.*

In all it was derived from the responses that thought there are possibilities of evaluation of violence representation in media by various means and methods, ample research on the subject has been carried on as well; the derived conclusions of such studies have not been considered by the industry. And as academic research deliberations on representation of violence have been ignored by the media industry, this leads to media continuing existing trends of representation, content and context with exceptional and explicit focus on violence.

### **3.2.9 Overcoming Inappropriate Representation of Violence**

Representation of violence in media apparently seems to have various negative connotations for media experts, academicians and media consumers. Experts believe that representation of violence or too much of violence in media has had negative

impact on media consumers, even more if it is over a prolonged period of time. Thus finding ways on overcoming the inappropriate representation of violence becomes an area of concern and systematic study in figuring out as to what may be the most practical way of fighting the perceived negative side of representation of violence. While there is ample amount of work done in various places in different times on determining inappropriate representation of violence and ill effects of exposure to media violence, there is little work in regard to situational and regional differences.

The responses (Figure 3.9) on ways of overcoming inappropriate representation of violence may be categorised as below:

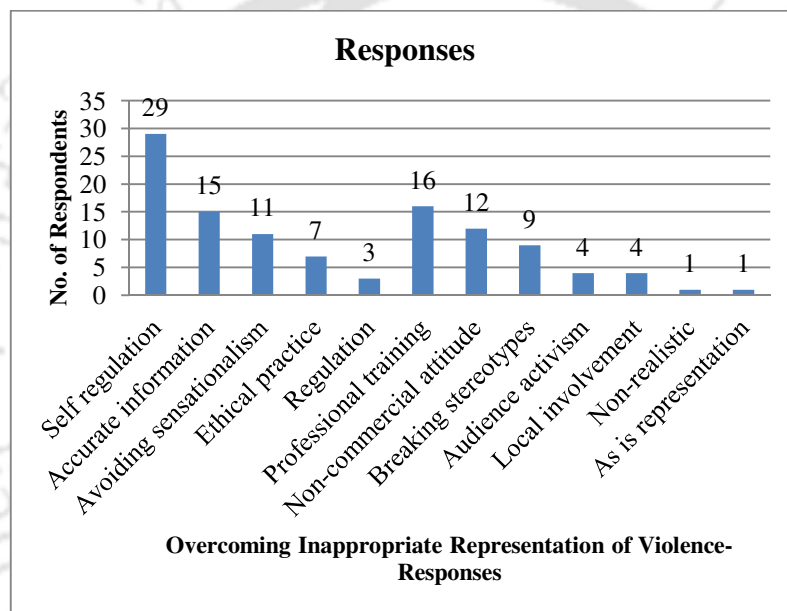


Figure 3.9: Responses on Overcoming Inappropriate Representation of Violence

**Self-regulation:** The most practical way of fighting the inappropriate representation of violence was apparently found to be self-regulation according to respondents. There certainly exists no strict regulatory body or censorships regarding representation of violence in media, therefore according to respondents, following of ethics at individual level become all the more essential. Self-regulation was pointed at as the most effective practical way of fighting the negative side of representation of violence in media, with 26% respondents (Figure 3.9) pointing towards it. But the problem that journalists face in today’s context is that the definition of ethics varies from individual to individual and organization to organization. Ethics, according to respondents, is a set of unsaid unwritten rules and regulations at very personal level.

While some do abide by these, there is no organizational or professional compulsion for the same. Exercising self-regulation in media, according to respondents also means, restraining from looking for personal gains on the part of reporters and editors or putting forward personal preconceived notions for the consumers.

The point is best reflected in the following selective responses on self regulation on the part of media practitioners:

*Every media house should set a definite structure of its limitations to present a news item containing violence. Moreover, all media houses should also have a self introspection and work for the benefits of the mass.*

*As a journalist, practicing strong ethics at each and every step of investigating the event to presenting it to the audience/readers will more than suffice to reduce and remove negativities in violence representation.*

*Media producers need to be conscious themselves and project events in dignified way, keeping in mind, the communal harmony and the mindset of the people. And it will be possible only when the media content producers are not biased. The media community should not feel superior enough to dictate opinions and verdicts to its audiences but instead should project true facts only. Keeping this balance is the outmost requirement of the news channels or a media organization who is supposed to give the correct projection and information to the viewers. Media makers need to be responsible themselves in absence of regulatory body. Every event needs to be intelligently represented in media, not twisting facts but putting them forward in intelligent manner.*

**Professional training:** Respondents feel that the current situation of violence being portrayed in negative light was lack of training and professionalism among the media fraternity in the region and also lack of knowledge among the larger section of media practitioners who deal with representation of the region in media. 16% respondents (Figure 3.9) said proper professional training to journalists, sensitising them about tackling crime and conflict would make them realise the sensitivity of issues and thus would contribute towards fighting the negative representational aspect of violence.

According to Regional Correspondent of a national television news channel:

*Journalists should be well trained professionals at the very first place. There should be regular training and workshop organized for reporters and journalists.*

**Accurate information:** 13% respondents (Figure 3.9) say that representation of violence can only be dealt with without portraying it as negative, if only facts are

authenticated and validated and only accurate information is disseminated through media. Ideally information should be such that it does not instigate or harm anyone. Thus respondents believed that any piece of information should be reported by media only after validating it from all relevant authorities and sources.

According to a senior reporter of a national television channel reporting from Assam:

*In the profit driven media industry there are many factors that instigate to break the news directly to the audiences with a slightest hint of it. There is pressure from authorities to exclusively file stories of violence with focus on destruction and loss. In this hurry of grabbing the information first and releasing to the audience fast, what is overlooked and often skipped is validation of facts and accuracy of information suffers, leading to a whole lot of misrepresentations, misunderstandings, falsifications and wrong perception creations. All that is not meant to be in news are finally in news because of all wrong reasons.*

According to Editor of a vernacular daily newspaper published from Guwahati:

*News reports are programmed to provide information. If facts are to be revealed, there should not be reporting of partial facts, information should not be concealed. Instead of striving for giving a personal or organisational version of a news story, objectivity giving all versions of all the involved parties shall help in proper representation.*

A respondent pointing at the competition that leads to one media house picking up information from another media house and playing up its own version is a trend that has oblate been into practice to compete and survive in the media industry. He opines:

*In-depth research on the topic before passing an overall prejudiced statement is very necessary. Facts should be properly analysed before drawing conclusion rather than being carried away by any other newspaper or news channel information.*

**Avoiding sensationalism:** Media practitioners are often accused of sensationalising stories in order to sell more of the media text to a larger section of audience. Sensationalise news reports journalist often results in inappropriate representation of violence, exaggerated facts and figures, and even fabrication of news. Thus sensationalism, a practice in contrast to desired objective journalism, was pointed out by 10% of respondents (Figure 3.9) to be avoided as one of the most practical ways of reducing inappropriate representation of violence in media. Selective responses with similar opinion are given below:

*The news makers need to understand their responsibility towards the society; accordingly without exaggerating the facts and figures they should represent the violence issues in unbiased*

*manner. The practice of sensational reporting should be essentially done away with for proper representation of people, issues and events in media.*

*Employing ethics and morality and avoiding unnecessary sensationalism while reporting incidents of violence is the only possible way to avoid inappropriate representation.*

**Non-realistic:** While majority of the respondents point at some practices that may be employed by media houses as a whole and individual media practitioners, to control and minimise inappropriate representation of violence, it was found that most respondents are giving opinions which was rather difficult to follow in this highly commercialised industry. Escalation consumerism involved in media has given rise to homogenisation of media products where violence has been accepted as the most selling content. According to 1% respondents (Figure 3.9) avoiding inappropriate information about violence in present media scenario is a non-realistic concept. As the Resident Editor of an English language newspaper puts it:

*Restraint on the part of reporters & editors in reporting conflict and respecting victims' privacy, have become mere theoretical words in 24X7 news coverage by TV channels and race to get scoop stories. Overcoming this take on violence by media houses is difficult as ethics, regulation, and non-sensationalism have become mere theoretical words in present practice of news coverage.*

**Breaking stereotypes:** 8% respondents (Figure 3.9) opine rejecting or discarding stereotypical projection of violence from the region already branded as violence prone is very essential to overcome the negatives and impropriations of representation of violence. Apparently positive approach towards news stories from the region becomes a must to change the image and perceptions. Following are few selective responses where respondents suggest breaking stereotypes would help in transforming the present media scenario with focus shifting from violent and negative stories to better representations:

*Dedicating a particular slot specially to cover offbeat stories from the region branded by media as violence prone would help to change perceptions and initiate constructive image building process by media itself.*

*Highlighting the other side of the region besides violence by media would be a positive change. Other than violent events, media attention may be diverted to issues like tourism, society, people and knowledge about the place etc.*

*To highlight human interest stories by civic journalism and avoiding stereotypical assumptions can be a significant role by media to fight negative representation of violence.*

Reflecting similar views is the response of a freelance journalist who says it is possible to rectify the misrepresentations of violence by breaking stereotypical projections and positive developmental stories:

*By drawing the attention of the people about how peace has been restored. Of how further violence will only make one suffer, by projecting developments and stop giving coverage to violence beyond a certain point.*

Another noteworthy mention is that in media representation of violence along with inappropriate visuals and text, careless use of terminology by media practitioners also amplifies the negative connotation of a particular media product. For instance words like militants, insurgents, terrorists, guerrillas, rebels have been interchangeable used in media for the non-state groups. It may be assumed that in not trying to comprehend and elaborate upon the details of the conflicts in the region, the mainstream media avoids creating complications and confusions among the media consumers. One easy way that the mainstream media employees for its diverse target consumers beyond the local boundaries to relate to the violence, conflicts and politics from the region, is by unanimously labelling the different armed groups in the region, surviving and fighting the Indian state as 'terrorists' (Hasan 2009). As rightly said, it "helps to translate the politics of the frontier into an easy reference point in the national media landscape" (McDuié-Ra 94) even though it leads to ignoring facts of their origin, cause, motives, strategies etc.

### **3.2.10 Representation of Violence as Survival Technique/Tactics**

As representation of violence was found to be a means of furthering specific gains mostly with commercial motives directly or indirectly, for either a media organisation or an individual practitioner; thus it may be concluded that representation of violence is a survival technique/ tactic used to sustain in the highly competitive environment of the media industry. Most respondents, 64% interviewed (Figure 3.10) accept that representation of violence in media is majorly used as a tool to survive in the media market.

The responses (Figure 3.10) on Representation of violence as survival technique/tactics may be categorised as below:

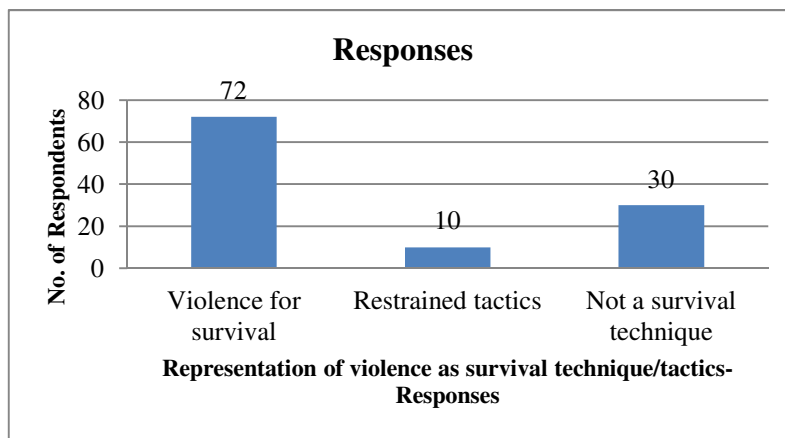


Figure 3.10: Responses on Representation of Violence as Survival Technique/Tactics

**Violence for survival:** Majority of the 64% respondents (Figure 3.10) opined about representation of violence as a survival tactics in the highly competitive consumerised media industry, for TRP and other commercial gains. Respondents opined, as explosions, riots, mass murders etc. are easy to understand with little contextual explanations, and thus violence is able to attract audiences.

According to a freelance journalist of Assam:

*If you go by general tendency of what people like. Sex and violence always comes on top, followed by politics, current affairs, sports, music and entertainment.*

According to Senior Copy Editor, of English language newspaper published from Guwahati:

*As most of the media houses are run as business nowadays, TRPs and readership numbers play a vital role in selecting the stories and reporting these in certain angles.*

According to Managing Editor of a television news channel broadcasted from Guwahati:

*Competition is the thumb rule of any successful media house today. Without completion there will not be any profit. The sole purpose of owning media house houses for profit. Therefore, in this kind of situation one of the elements of survival techniques is depiction of violence. Media houses have been pouring in the violent content for the viewers and the viewers are readily accepting them.*

According to Producer of television news channel:

*Violence attracts audience. This is an undoubted survival technique of the media house for increasing TRP's and revenue generation.*

Referring to the facts exaggeration in content as well as representation a regional as a survival tactic a vernacular language newspaper editor said:

*More than survival techniques it is one up-manship with the competitors. It is a business profit tactic. The twisted facts and rounded up figures are only to stay first in the media competition.*

Entirely agreeing that violence representation is a survival strategy of the media houses and the vernacular language media explores it to the fullest to increase readership circulation, Staff reporter of a vernacular language newspaper organization said:

*More the story sells stronger you become to survive in the media industry. And violence sells, that's a known, experienced, proved and the most practiced fact of today. We constantly look for such stories which interest our readers and are useful piece of information.*

According to Editor of a vernacular language newspaper organisation:

*This is a competitive world and earning is the first priority for any media house and to survive. To remain in race and to compete with other media houses violence cannot be avoided.*

**Restrained tactics:** 9% respondents (Figure 3.10) opined that representation of violence is not the only survival tactics employed by media to exist and function in the highly commercial industry. Though violence representation constitutes a considerable amount of media content respondents opined that violence was not the primary technique employed to endure the market scenario.

According to Editor of a regional vernacular newspaper organization:

*30% of the total news content is violence oriented. The actual event representation is very less, most of it is the aftermath. Violence not always can be said to be media's survival tactics.*

According to Producer (News) of a regional television channel:

*Violence is not the only option to survive but ofcourse it is one. At times media creates unnecessary hype over incidents of violence, over representation and misrepresentation at times too.*

**Not a survival technique:** 27% respondents (Figure 3.10) refute to representation of violence being a survival technique/tactics for media houses, contradicting the opinion of the majority the rest 64% of the respondents interviewed. While respondents agree that violence representation is dominant in media content, they see it as a reality reflection in media which cannot be and should not be avoided. Respondents believe violence in media is for informing the audiences and not for the

sake of popularity, gaining TRPs and circulations. However, in representing instances of violence in media, respondents suggest, regulations are required to limit and control representation of violence.

According to regional Correspondent of a national English language newspaper:

*Violence is a part of the society and media will always render news of anything that exists in the society. Violence is not media creation.*

Pointing at the fact that violence in media may be repulsive for the media consumers if flared out of proportions, and that too much violence representation cannot be a survival tactics in media industry as it may adversely affect the media organisations' reputation, credibility and audience, Senior Editor of a regional television news channel says:

*If you go by general tendency of what people like, sex and violence always comes on top, followed by politics, current affairs, sports, music and entertainment. Representation of violence however is an important criterion for TV or Print media but it is not the most important one. You cannot fill up 24 hours or for that matter 24 pages of news with only violence. People do like violence but too much of it generally tends to push readers/viewers away. Overall, it's just a fraction of what news content gets published on air or on paper. It is definitely not a tactic.*

Reflecting upon the view that violence is not a media creation but mere representation which needs to be regulated so that it would not instigate misconceptions or igniting further violence, CEO & Content Editor of a television news channel broadcasted from Guwahati says:

*It is not a survival tactics, it is a trend set by us. What we represent and the way we do it depends on the message we intent to communicate. The message is not 'violence' but the 'incidence' of violence. We can surely change it, if we want to. A content regulatory body is the need of the hour in Northeast.*

### **3.2.11 Representation of Violence in Practice: Scale and Exposure**

As violent content may impact the consumers in undesirable manner, the scale of violence in media representation, what is exposed in media and what is not becomes important to look into. Apparently there are certain unsaid rules, mostly ethical practices, that media needs to follow while dealing with violent content, thought there does not exist any official rule book (section 3.2.2). Editorial policies that are supposed to set the norms for representation of violence in media are also found to be

flexible and relaxed (section 3.2.3). The commercial approach of media seems to be working behind the general reporting of violence (section 3.2.7).

The responses (Figure 3.11) on scale and exposure of violence representation may be categorised as below:

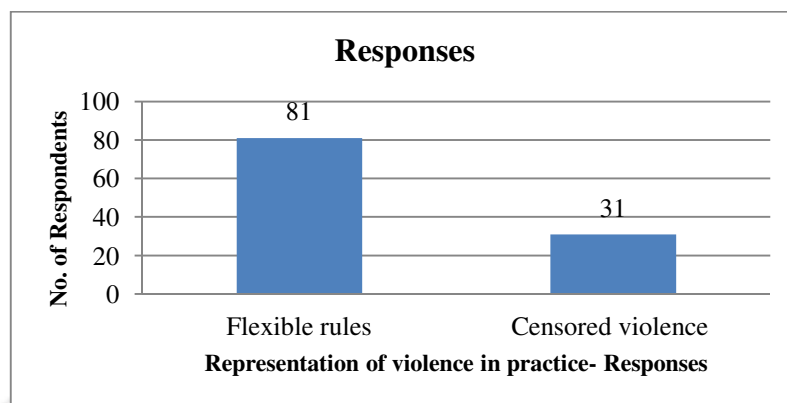


Figure 3.11: Responses on Scale and Exposure of Violence Representation

**Flexible rules:** Regarding the scale of violence, what is exposed in media and what is restricted from publicity, 72% opined (Figure 3.11) that no particular standards are followed by individual media practitioners and media houses regarding representation of violence in media.

According to Desk editor and Feature writer of a regional English language newspaper:

*Norms are always forgotten while reporting violence. Except graphics that can be visually very disturbing, for instance, innards of the killed or murdered person, rest all is exposed.*

According to CEO & Content Editor of a regional television news channel:

*All kinds of violence are shown on the channel. If there is a need to censor some story or visuals or a fact in a story, for larger national interest, it is sometime not aired.*

According to Producer (Assamese News) of a regional television news channel:

*Theoretically we always try to avoid visuals that depict violence but practically we most of the time forget and cross a certain limit in depicting the violent contents.*

According to Bureau Chief of a national television news channel and news network:

*It depends on the situation, since we go for National coverage and its National importance, scale and exposure level varies from event to event. Also the demand of the national media houses set standards.*

According to Freelance journalist:

*There are several unsaid rules. But depending on situations rule books are also modified instantly depending upon the intensity of the situation. Covered news programmes featuring violence are mostly elaborate and extensive.*

Specifically pointing at reporting of crime against women, News-coordinator of a regional news channel of Assam says, that the media possess all means and power to report and expose any kind of violence without any restrictions to the public. But in the present media scenario in reporting crimes the victims need to be vocal about their grievances in order to avoid misreporting or over-representation of facts.

*I think we have everything we need to cover incidents of crime against women in any intensity and report. Crimes sometimes are not violent. They can vary from time to time based on situational circumstances. Representation of violence would have changed a lot had many cases of crime against women/children reported in police stations. Moreover, women in rural areas do not tend to exercise their rights in protecting themselves despite the law providing them with adequate security. The trend in urban centres is moreover same. Thus reporting of violence is mostly based on the reporters' knowledge and perception.*

**Censored violence:** 28% respondents (Figure 3.11) opined that representation of violence is kept minimal in scale and exposure for mass consumption. Apparently, as means to censor the depiction of violence in media, photos or graphic details of gory incidents of violence are not published or flashed, graphic tools are used to distort images or visuals, language used is taken care of, and similar techniques are employed to keep the consumers of the media away from the direct negative impact of direct reporting of violence.

According to Freelance journalist from Assam:

*Apart from disseminating information, media also plays the role of a gatekeeper. Hence due importance is given while exposing the masses to any incident of violence. It is always a constant endeavour to keep the scale of violent content to the minimum possible and that it does not affect the audience in any way.*

According to Sub-editor of a regional vernacular language newspaper:

*Any gory incident is reduced to the main facts without over sensationalising and going to its intricate details. We tell the people what and how much is necessary.*

According to regional correspondent of a national newspaper organization:

*We don't exaggerate any news of violence ever. We always try to balance it with only factual information and try not to harm anyone's sentiments. We have a strict no for any nuisance.*

According to Producer (Assamese news) of a regional television channel:

*Blood, gory images, faces of victims are usually blurred. Physical fighting like slapping, fist-fights etc. are shown. Bomb blasts, gunshots are also shown but when required images are blurred.*

According to Copy Editor of an English language newspaper published from Assam:

*Violence particularly religious violence is handled very carefully, thorough research and objectivity is majorly checked and only then information is let out to the masses.*

According to Freelance Senior journalist of Assam:

*Ethnic violence if any is mentioned without reference to ethnicity of accused or victims. Similar is the case of refraining from referring religion, nationality and location in sensitive media reports.*

According to Staff reporter of a vernacular language newspaper:

*The incidents of violence are reported keeping in view that the reporting does not intensify the violence while the public is to be informed about the incident; at least the prime facts to be reported.*

According to Sub-editor of a national newspaper organisation:

*A take on the atrocity of the incident is always helpful in the coverage of the aftermath of any violence, which media does. But it is rare in the daily jostle of television stories. Otherwise mostly information about violence is filtered before producing it for the audiences in print media.*

Majority of respondents who pointed at the need to censor violence representation were found to be associated with the print media houses. Out of 31 respondents who hint at censored violence 27 were associated with the print media industry. As they stressed upon need to filter information before finally being served to the audiences, there was always a scope for negotiation in terms of reporting magnitude and relevance in times of severe competition and large scale massacres.

### **3.2.12 Mainstream Media and Conventional Violence**

Mainstream media houses, national newspapers or news channels mostly based in Delhi the national capital, with huge spread with viewership/readership throughout the nation and abroad, usually accept certain level or categories of violence, the so called conventional violence in industry terms. These forms of violence are mostly found to be in accordance to the popular audience beliefs and media understanding in

relation to any particular place, region, events or persons. In popular notion of the industry, certain criteria that work well for any information being easily accepted and picked up by the national mainstream media are these instances of conventional violence.

The responses (Figure 3.12) on Mainstream Media and Conventional Violence may be categorised as below:

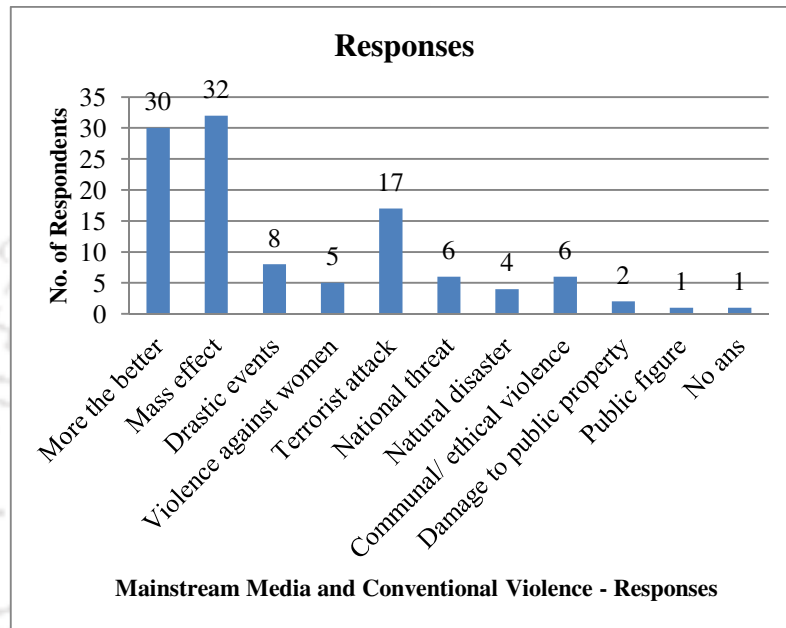


Figure 3.12: Responses on Mainstream Media and Conventional Violence

**More the better:** Regarding any specific level or category of violence which is usually accepted by the mainstream media (national newspapers or channels, respondents felt more the content was violent. 27% of the respondents (Figure 3.12) opined that there are absolutely no restrictions when it comes to projection of violence in media. More the violence it gets projected in a better way, with more space and time exposure.

According to Senior Copy Editor of an English language newspaper of Assam:

*Different media houses have different editorial policies which govern their story selection and story angles and language or visual selection to present the stories. Few media houses show restraint while others dramatise the stories to tap into their target readers or audience. Also, a few 24\*7 news channels keep on repeating, often irrelevant, angles of a story to fill up the slots. Violence is undoubtedly a mass attracter, and thus they make prolonged LIVE coverage, news reports or full page cover stories in national media.*

According to Desk Editor of a Television news channel broadcasted from Guwahati, Assam:

*There is no cap on the level of violence – the gorier, the better. Of course, the usual censor tools are used when printing/broadcasting news about such violence.*

According to Desk Editor Sub-editor of a vernacular language newspaper publication house:

*The degree of cruelty or barbarity is looked at to include it in newspapers and to make it to the 'Headlines' and 'Lead stories'. I think the human interest angle should matter while judging violence related stories.*

According to CEO & Content Editor of a regional television news channel:

*In modern media, anything can be made acceptable as news for a larger audience. Though it depends on who reports the story and how he wants to represent the story.*

According to Copy editor cum Correspondent of an English Language newspaper published from Guwahati:

*Almost all kinds of violence gains media attention provided its effect is huge and affecting many. Priority is given depending upon their sale value.*

**Mass affect:** Mainstream media, respondents believe, only accepts stories of violence when the violence affects or is expected to affect a large number of people. 29% respondents (Figure 3.12) say such mass affecting violence impacting huge masses, is apparently 'attention grabber' and thus there is no specific level or category of violence which is usually projected or vice versa. Two of the respondents referred to another aspect of the region, directly or indirectly related to violence affecting a large group of people, a conventional form of representation of violence in mainstream media. *Bandhs* or general strikes apparently a regular affair in the region as either cause or consequence of violence, is accepted by the mainstream media for reporting the region.

According to a freelance journalist reporting for seven northeastern states:

*Violence which can grab attention of the masses or influence the masses is accepted by mainstream media.*

According to Regional Correspondent of a regional vernacular language newspaper:

*The national channels and newspapers usually give priority to those violence incidents which effect majority of people or which may threaten the national security affecting a huge population and in turn which may increase TRP or circulation of any newspaper.*

According to Bureau Chief of an international news agency:

*Larger the number of people affected, the larger coverage far and wide is the thumb rule. Only when a whole village is burnt or it gains space and time in national media, only when villages are washed away it is shown in national channels for some time. Other than that the national media is not at all bothered about the region. Violence that is really furious with big loss of life gains media attention.*

Producer News (English bulletin) of a regional television news channel:

*In all any event, happening or activity that affects a larger number of people gains national coverage. Bandhs and general strikes resulting in halt of national communication systems such as railways, roadways and also bringing local life to standstill attract media attention.*

**Drastic events:** 7% respondents (Figure 3.12) said that those are only drastic events which are able to gain mainstream media attention. Apparently big stories get media time and space whereas small ones figure only in local media. The media makers have their own rule to decide what intensity of violence and its affect is newsworthy. The usual yardstick is figures that dictate the news value.

According to a freelance journalist reporting from Assam:

*Incidents which hit the nerve centre of the entire nation, usually major acts of violence, human displacement or huge natural calamities gain coverage. Mainstream media usually looks out for stories that set a precedent or those which they may claim to be a revelation to the rest of the world. Small cases of crime do get mentioned only in local media.*

**Violence against women:** 4% respondents (Figure 3.12) refer to gender related violence as the most easily accepted form of violence by the mainstream media. Though largely believed, Assam and the whole of the Northeast is considerably safe for women and social crimes against women are significantly less in the region. It is evident that of late news on atrocities against women has gained popularity in news worldwide. News reports on violence against women have started being reported from the region, when it comes to the regional aspects. The practice of witch hunting in Assam is one form of violence against women which has got considerable prominence in media, especially the local regional media. Though it continues to grab national headlines (see Image 29) on selective occasions, there are other aspects also which have been included in media content of late. Referring to array of instances of violence against women in Assam which have found place in media representations in

recent times, Senior News Producer of a national television news channel states that this is primarily because of the changing trends in national media scenario:

*Witch hunting was suppose to be the only aspect that occurs as an aspect of atrocities against women in the region, which has gained a lot of media attention from Assam. But now we even get news of dowry deaths to incidents of rape, assaults to molestations, harassments and all sorts of news disrespecting women are picked up by national media. This is mainly because these are new stories coming up from the region and also because women issues in general have gained a lot of momentum in national media scenario.*

According to Correspondent of a national English Language newspaper, Guwahati edition:

*Issues picked and played up by media are issues related to sexual violence, women atrocities, sex scandals etc. It is not unique to Assam, but such cases are new for Assam.*

Referring to the coverage of a certain specific kind of news on violence against women in Assam which gets media attention, mentions were made of the practice of witch hunting. Noteworthy is the fact that proper reporting on this practice should have lead to the issue receiving due media attention, authority attention leading to stricter laws and punishments, and also raising awareness among the people. But as Northeast Correspondent of a national investigative journalism magazine regrets, the mainstream media does not report enough on such cases, other than for furthering political interests at times. On the other hand it is apparent that in reporting instances of gender violence, the regional media is found to be imitating the news trends of the national mainstream media. The metro based media houses have of late been found extensively reporting on violence against women, making it the prominent issue of debate and discussions. Other than violence and conflicts the recent trend in regional media has been reporting on violence against women.

**Terrorist attacks:** Terrorist attacks usually receive media space and time depending upon the extent of its effect. Related factors like scale of violence, perpetrators, alliance with popular perceptions, targets and location of attack, play very significant role in determining the interest of media in reporting on it and representation pattern. Apparently any activity which may be termed as terrorist attack as threat to the nation or state is considered a potent piece of information to grab media attention. 15% respondents (Figure 3.12) refer to generalised concept of terrorist attacks and resulting

violence and fear thereafter to be extensively accepted by the mainstream media houses, provided it qualifies the numbers, impact and expected return. Respondents basically clubbed under terrorist attacks news reports on terror groups, terror attacks, bomb blasts, mass attacks, killings, facts and figures of casualties, number of affected people, information on future terror attacks, terrorist activities. Selective responses pointing at terrorist activities to top the list of mainstream media attention are given below:

According to editor of a vernacular language newspaper organisation:

*National newspapers and national news channels have always associated Assam with terrorist activities. Archives clearly suggest that Assam was somewhere near the national headlines only with terror attacks.*

According to Sub Editor of an English language newspaper organisation of Assam:

*Terrorism instils fear in the minds of people and fear sells. Media through its detailed and graphical reports of violence apparently encashes this fear. May be mainstream media seems is only interested in news from northeast when it is related to terrorism. Other mundane stories are not considered attractive news material.*

Archival reports and responses confirm that news from the region has largely involved around terror and violence. Mainstream media seems to be giving more coverage to those situations of violence which prove to be potential threat to the entire nation, when the number of affected people are more, and the political stories are considerably sensational ones. The print media reports on violence with explicit violence photojournalism finds place in mainstream media (see Image 1, 11, 12, 25, 26,). Similar is the case of national television news channels where direct or indirect implied messages of explicit violence feature in mainstream, either with direct visuals of violence (see Image 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 13, 18, 19, 23, 27) and extensive reporter insight stories (see Image 5, 21 31, 36). In another instance as assumed threat to national security figures in news irrespective of lack of visuals or authentication where the text graphics loosely translates into “Assam appearing to be Al-Qaeda’s target” (see Image 32). Stories of mass violence, in lack of visual support are often seen being carried with graphical details, charts (see Image 30, 32, 40) or file footages. These are the kind of stories that have been able to attract mainstream media attention.

**National Threat:** National security is seen as a domain that every individual media consumer shows interest in and requires being alert. This psychology also works behind the media practitioners. 5% respondents (Figure 3.12) opine that any piece of news that may be presumed as threat to national security, especially when it comes from the region as any community based in the region presumably carrying on or planning to carry on subversive activities from the region, is taken up by the mainstream media houses and is treated as news of utmost importance highlighting the regional specifications.

According to Bureau Chief (Northeast India) of an international news agency based in Guwahati:

*National mainstream media is very nation centric. In their pursuit to cater to the informational needs of the entire nation, they often try to link issues to national security in Assam related context so as to gain wider popularity, interest a larger section of audience. In doing so at times media also creates and propagates sense of fear among the people through the presentation style and content. Issues of international border activities such as incursion, infiltration, illegal migration and cross border activities which may threaten the national security through Assam or the entire Northeastern region, always finds place (may be undue as well) in mainstream media slots and media space.*

**Communal/ ethnic violence:** Ethnicity and community are apparently treated as key elements in media constructed identities in any report on violence. 5% respondents (Figure 3.12) referred to violence with overtones of communal violence, ethnic clashes, issue of separate states etc. are reports which easily are accepted by mainstream media provided the magnitude of violence is in accordance to their yardstick. It is also seen that reports on violence in reference to ethnicity and community conflict are often reports on figures and identity identification as regard to roles played in the violence. The media usually has a preconceived notion about certain identities and representations are accordingly constructed in media reports. In most cases alternative perspective in these clashes are often not provided by media.

According to Copy Editor of a regional vernacular language newspaper organisation:

*Due to considerable decline in terrorism related activities in the state and thereafter similar news, media seems to have shifted focus on ethnic and communal violence.*

**Natural disasters:** National 4% respondents pointed at national disasters to have grabbed national media attention in larger perspectives than many other issues from

the region. News reports on floods and earthquakes are seen figuring in mainstream media (see Image 33, 34, 35). But though a small percentage of respondents pointed at natural disasters mostly floods and earthquakes, there are actually very few reported instances where natural disaster managed to reach the national mainstream media news bulletins and newspapers pages with proper research were provided adequate coverage with due space and time. Apparently respondents were found to believe that the natural disaster is also treated as a part of living in the secluded landscape and thus with intention to widen spread and reach of coverage the mere mention of distant incidents are required. But rest media respondents showed dissatisfaction the way, especially the national mainstream media does not give adequate coverage to the disasters of Assam.

According to Senior Correspondent of an English language newspaper published from Guwahati:

*Records and archives are evident that Assam floods in Brahmaputra, Majuli erosion, have figured in mainstream media.*

**Damage of public property:** 2% respondents (Figure 3.12) mentioned damage of public property in large scale may be considered as conventional violence. May be because of violence, or calamities, in both the cases damage as per respondents is an aspect that mainstream media reports upon.

**Public figure involvement:** 1% of the respondents (Figure 3.12) were of the opinion that mainstream media is found giving attention to the public figures of the region and their involvement or reaction to violence were given prominence. Most of the respondents refer to politicians gaining media space while few also referred to cultural icons belonging to the region. These also include stray incidents of scandals related to prominent personalities' of the region with violent overtones.

It was derived from the responses that violence remains the dominant content of media representations which is sought after by the mainstream media. Some respondents express serious concern over the fact that it requires incidences of mass violence, affecting considerably large number of people, to gain mainstream media attention. And moreover the media representations are limited not only in respect to media time, space but also in adequate research and authenticity. It is also seen that

with changing scenario of declining “terrorist activities” in the region ethnic and community clashes have taken the place. At one point of time northeast was purged with terrorist activities and hence the associated news. But due to the change in socio-economic conditions news related to communal and ethnic violence has become rampant in mainstream media which are more or less reflections of the regional news representations only. It is further believed by respondents, that regional media resort to violence and aggression only to grab media attention knowing the mainstream media frenzy about violence which is often explained as newsworthiness.

As evident regional news reports have never had the “power to influence mainstream opinion or policy making at a level of the central government, or even state governments” (Sen 93). In the regional journalistic profession, as derived from the responses, it becomes important to report a story that is picked up by mainstream media houses. “In the face of editorial neglect, journalists have only played a critical role through reporting violence, simply because this is how they have managed to publish or air their reports” (93). This proves credibility of the media practitioner as well and ofcourse benefits the media house.

### **3.2.13 Media Commercialisation: Saleable Violence**

Intended commercial success of media has resulted in TRPs and circulation figures appear more important factors of news identification than content. As representation of violence is apparently found to be huge businesses, there are certain aspects of violence which receive more media attention. The commercialisation of news content for revenue generation is evident in all spheres of media in selective reporting of violence incidents.

The responses (Figure 3.13) on Media Commercialisation and Saleable Violence may be categorised as below:

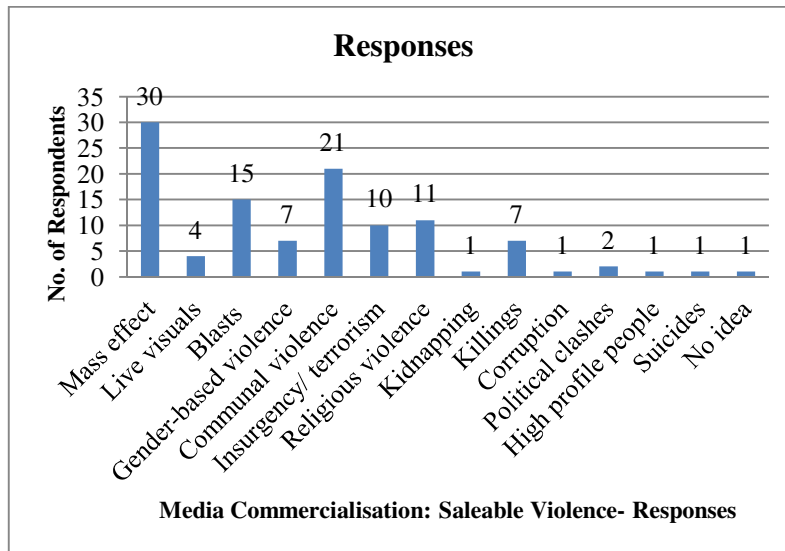


Figure 3.13: Responses on Media Commercialisation: Saleable Violence

**Mass affect:** 27% respondents (Figure 3.13) opine that violence affecting larger number of people like large-scale massacres, riots, firings etc are incidents of violence that gain more attention of the media consumers as well as media makers. Apparently violence which causes huge loss of life and property with desired representation in media has more saleable value, thus gains more media concentration.

According to Staff Reporter of a vernacular language newspaper organisation:

*Large scale massacres like blasts and riots are preferred over other minor crimes which are not capable of creating as much sensation as the major violence generating events. Apart from gaining majority of the consumer attention these incidents also gain mainstream or national/international media attention.*

According to Assistant Producer (English News) of a regional television news channel:

*Violence which has a greater impact factor and affects large number of the population and which involves blasts, riots, shootouts, sleaze, high profile names, sex, and so on.*

According to Editor of a vernacular language newspaper organization:

*Action and reactions of large scale massacres mostly by alleged anti social elements, anti-national activities which may affect the entire nation and national interest as a whole, usually gain more TRP.*

According to a vernacular language newspaper Editor:

*Violence as it is when affects many or may be of concern to a larger group of people is considered news worthy. Further dramatisation of violence in information and presentation by a few TV news channels are intentionally done to attract audiences. This system is slowly*

*penetrating in the print media as well to sustain readerships and compete with the electronic media.*

**LIVE visuals:** 4% respondents (Figure 3.13) referred to *LIVE* visuals of violence gain more media attention than any other form of media representation of violence. This representation is restricted to electronic media, the television news channels mostly, where *LIVE* coverage of violence and direct broadcasting without deploying editing techniques include direct from spot reporting with live visuals of war, any kind of unrest, large scale conflict.

According to Editor In Chief of a regional multilingual television news channel:

*Unedited footages of violence when aired from the field creates mass hysteria. This creates fear and in turn media consumers intent to gather more and more information available, and in doing so they view more of programme providing information on the particular issue. In case of violence there is no better way of giving out first hand information of the event and current activities, right from field. LIVE footages also serve well the inquisitive lot of media consumers.*

**Blasts:** 13% respondents (Figure 3.13) unanimously refer to news reports on blasts-bomb blasts, grenade blasts, human bombing etc. considered potential enough to grab audience attention. Respondents believe that media irrespective of location is more concerned who was responsible for the blast and how many people did the blast “kill”. As a respondent points out “*blasts are too big and too scary for media to miss out*”. But in the process what media tends to miss out is the region has lot more to offer to media consumers other than pure facts and figures of violence.

**Gender-based violence:** Reporting on gender related violence have been on the rise since, 6% respondents (Figure 3.13) believe gender related violence have oblate gaining momentum and media attention. Predominantly gender related violence focus mainly on female version of stories in regards to domestic violence, sexual harassment and trafficking. Here media role in representing instances of gender biased violence has been criticised by many for sensationalising such stories of violence for commercial gains rather than creating awareness among masses or preventing repetition of unpleasant incidents. Another view of gender related violence being reported extensively by media is that it establishes the social responsibility of the media house in pointing out social evils and also trying to support the victim(s) towards justice and punish offenders through media trials only.

According to correspondent reporting for national television news channel from Assam:

*Sexual harassment, violence against women, rape are considered good topic for extensive coverage and gaining popularity in the media world.*

**Communal riots:** 19% respondents (Figure 3.13) referred to communal violence or ethnic conflict as being the most saleable representation in media.

According to Freelance journalist and Principal Correspondent of an International Current affairs and news magazine:

*In anticipating the report to make national impact reports on communal clashes are given huge detailed coverage. In present day context news reports of communal clashes are extremely persuasive. There are instances where hurried and unauthenticated representation, even misrepresentation of real facts have encouraged spreading of rumours. This is a complete negative approach of media reporting. For example the SMS rumours that lead to fleeing of people from parts of India creating panic situation, was because of the hurried representation of the situation in Assam. But strict measures taken by the local as well as central government has prevented such events to some extent. But as long as news is judged only by its sale value with commercialised media market approach, reoccurring of similar situations cannot be prevented.*

**Insurgency, terrorism:** 9% respondents (Figure 3.13) refer to insurgency and related terrorism. It was found that respondents seem to assume insurgency and terrorism as synonymous activities and were associating the two terms, under the impression and understanding these as cause and effect of one another. Respondents from media who refer to insurgency and terrorism together as most selling media representation of the region, understand that insurgencies include terrorism. Given that insurgency and terrorism as piece of news information has potential to grab instant mass attention is seen as prospective viewership and readership booster information. Thus when such information is presented in a particular intriguing manner is expected to trade the media product well in market.

According to Bureau Chief of an international news agency reporting from Assam for all seven northeastern states:

*Insurgency and terrorism in Assam is one of the most and probably the only news that gains unquestioned attention. It is considered that Assam is one of the states in the entire nation where*

*major militant activities are planned and carried on with very active insurgency practices. News on insurgency and terrorism is undoubtedly in demand throughout. And as journalist we are on the constant look out for such news, to fulfil the demand. We all need to perform up to some expectations, compete and strive.*

**Religious violence:** 10% respondents (Figure 3.13) confirm that violence stories with religious undertones are most encouraged by media houses. Particularly in case of Assam the more saleable content is apparently found to be reports on conflicting ideologies based on regions faiths, where most of the cases are conflicts between “*Muslim minorities*” and “*indigenous entities*”.

**Killing:** 6% respondents referred to killings at large being considered one of the aspects which gain media attention. Killings include murders, shootouts, encounters, mass violence casualties etc.

Other respondents while referring to various forms of violence (Figure 3.13) that gain more media attention depending upon the sale value, mention about **Kidnapping** (1%); **Corruption** (1%); **Political clashes** (2%); **High profile people** (1%) respondent referred to the names involved in scandals and **Suicides** (1%).

Media commercialisation in terms of practice refers to the process of selecting content and context specifically to be represented in media which when offered to the media consumers will be accepted well prompting individual or organisational gains. Media practitioners from the region are found to prove efficiency and excellence in collecting those kinds of information and representing them to the consumers of media which has more sale value, which would in turn lead to increase in readership or viewership. It was reconfirmed from the respondents that violence in being reported from Northeast and Assam in particular has inlaid benefits of easy acceptance along with keeping in trend. Commercialising violence seems to be one of the primary cause of trivialisation of content and quality of news and more so in regard to Northeast generalisation of facts and figures to develop a story with conflict and violence as dominant media texts. In present day context a media house is more of a growing business house with individuals seeking and organisations working towards personal gains.

Commercial success of media organisations had become a function of advertising revenues rather than subscription and circulation figures. The advertisers had thus replaced the recipients of media products. By the same logic, circulation figures, meant to attract advertising, became more important than content.

### **3.3 Assam through Media Representations**

Experts from media industry and academia have pointed Northeast figures in the national consciousness as a society predominantly associated with the terms terrorism and violence (Sanjib Baruah and others). The term *Northeast* has been so extensively used in media that individual states cease to exist in singular identity. A burning example may be cited of the “*Incredible India*”, the international marketing campaign of Government of India to promote tourism. No other state in India is advertised with a regional reference, but *Northeast India* is. Of all the seven sister states only Assam and Mizoram appear on individual state tourism advertisements, but are seldom seen on public media outlets. The campaign of Incredible Northeast with the tagline “paradise unexplored” (see Image 41) is apparently seen on mainstream as well as regional media as well.

When specifically enquired about Assam, it was found to be a general tendency of the respondents to club all of the northeastern states while deliberating upon the present media scenario of the entire region. Respondents were unable to talk about the state of Assam in isolation when talking on media scenario and prevalent systems of representation of violence. Therefore the questions which were intended to be directed for Assam only, to maintain consistency in responses were directed to derive answers on entire Northeast, with specific emphasis on Assam.

#### **3.3.1 Media Representation of Violence in Northeast: Media Reaction**

Media is fundamentally believed to be meant for contentment and gratification of its users. Apparently no media maker wants to surprise the users, the readers and viewers, with a brand new content about the region. Thus a volatile region is projected in the same lines as it always has been projected. And there are also external factors contributing for the similar projection like political interference, lack of professionalism, lack of proper training etc. Thus the media reaction towards the

representation of violence in media with reference to the region was mostly in accordance to the popular beliefs, prevalent perceptions and long practiced media patterns and trends. While responding to the way violence in Northeast has been and is being represented in media, most respondents were found to believe that media at various instances has failed to deliver issues in violence of northeast unambiguously to its consumers. Separate media house tends to represent violence in its own perceived way which is not always the reality.

The responses (Figure 3.14) on how violence in Northeast is represented in media may be categorised as below:

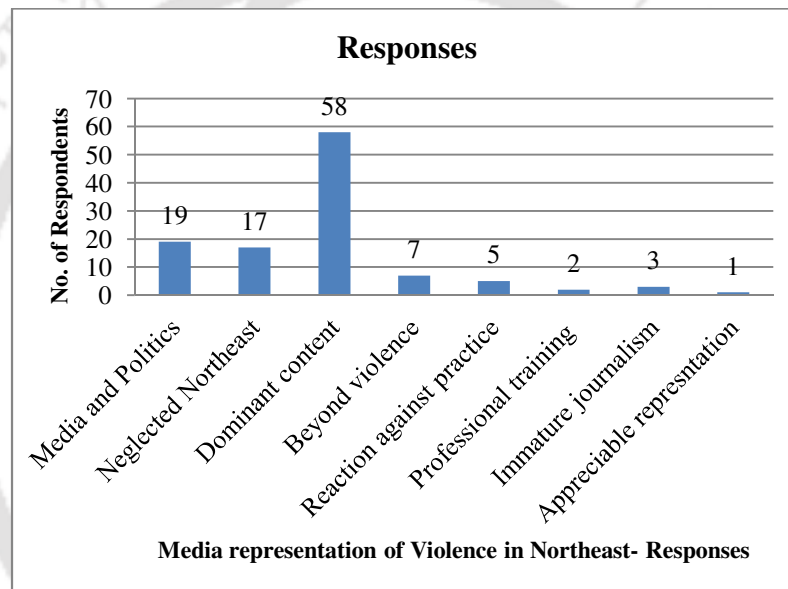


Figure 3.14: Responses on How Violence in Northeast is Represented in Media

**Media and politics:** 17% respondents (Figure 3.14) point at the role of politics in media to be one of the prime reasons for the present situation of too much of violence being projected to the outside world through media representations of the region. Mostly because of political interference or excessive political involvement in media the representation of the northeast in media, local as well as mainstream, has been so far so confined, selective and limited.

According to News Producer of a television news channel:

*Most of the incidents related to violence are always political oriented. In the past few years the depiction of violence in the region has been very biased. Media played and took their liberty to depict violence in their own way. Media should play a vital role in creating harmony and not bring differences among the people. In the clashes that occurred in Assam most of the media*

*could not report the real. In fact most of them were politically monitored. If that is the present situation of media in this region then the real purpose of the media is not served.*

**Neglected Northeast:** 15% respondents (Figure 3.14) point at the complete ignorance of the mainstream media regarding the region which results in the state of Assam and Northeast in general being neglected region in mainstream media by the mainstream media.

According to Sub-editor of a vernacular language newspaper published in Guwahati:

*Any issue of the Northeast hardly attracts the national media, be it violence or development issues. Mainstream media neglects Northeast completely.*

According to a senior freelance journalist from Assam:

*Regional media in Assam gives proper details of the violence issues in northeast, but such issues doesn't get major attention of the national media houses.*

**Dominant content:** 52% respondents (Figure 3.14) interviewed opined that instances of violence acts, incidents and events have comprised the prime content in media from the region for long. The dominant violent content in media is attributed to the mainstream media attitude and perceptions of the media makers. Representation of violence apparently claimed to be unadulterated form of the happenings or situations are mostly found to be biased, selective and subjective recount of facts and figures.

According to Assistant Producer (English News) of a regional television news channel:

*Incidents of violence mostly get reported from the region and are often presented as separate or special cases of violence peculiar to the region.*

According to Sub-editor of a regional newspaper published in English:

*From the "little" coverage given to the Northeast in national papers, violence definitely is given precedence over development. As a result, Northeast is looked upon as violence afflicted zone, a land of extremist and jungle man, where no development takes place.*

According to Senior Copy Editor of a national English language newspaper:

*The rest of India views Northeast as a trouble torn state. No doubt Northeast has been marred by many violent incidents since the formation of various terrorist organisations here, but mainstream media of the rest of India also seeks stories mostly related to violence only from this region.*

According to Producer (News) of a Regional television news channel:

*Violence now a day is an integral part when it comes to representation of North East. So many issues are attached to North East for example extremism, communal riots, animal poaching in National Parks, natural calamities etc.*

According to Correspondent of a national newspaper organisation:

*Violence of northeast basically insurgency has dominated the news items for a long time in the region. It will always have its affect and going to find a place in the media for sometime.*

According to Feature-writer of national English language newspaper with Guwahati edition:

*While being true in statistics and other data, the representation blows it out of proportion – whether to bring home the message to the audience, or to catch their attention in the first place. For intelligent audience, this is a put-off more than an enhancing component of the overall representation of violence.*

According to Northeast correspondent of a National television news channel:

*Northeast violence or insurgency news are often highlighted and reported by its own regional media; and more so by the national and international media. Media is driven by commercial market driven dynamics wherein it all depends upon what sells in the market. News is shown or reported which readers want to read or know. Hence, violence is increasingly reported from northeast India. This hampers the image of the region and adversely affects industry like tourism.*

According to Correspondent of newspaper organisation published from Guwahati:

*Violence in north east has been projected in a rather stereotypical way where not much importance is given to the root cause but more on numbers and explosive details. Such a representation often leads to misinterpretation by the mainstream audience who begin to associate the north east with chaos and cacophony. Most important stories are negated and only a certain type of stories is reported on and on. Issues related to environment or development is hugely ignored at times.*

According to Staff-reporter of an Assamese newspaper organisation:

*Violence in Northeast is not new but as Northeast is regarded as the region that is cut off from the mainland India, the representation of the recent violence here is taken as a big deal in media. The local channels and newspapers are flooded with exclusive reports. Others are projecting it as an act of immense terrorism that was prevalent. In my opinion it is good in some ways that the region is getting all the media responses but it is also true that it's getting covered for all the bad reasons.*

According to Freelance journalist of the region, also Editor of a current affairs magazine:

*Violence draws instant attention; so its representation is precious, cautious, sensational rather than sensible. Sensible journalism is hard to find in today's industry. The game of violence is all for revenue generation.*

According to freelance journalist from Assam:

*Mostly violence in Northeast are presented in a 'bird's eye view' in National mainstream media (however things are changing somewhat with more people from Northeast representing the region in National media at various levels) and at regional traces of exaggeration of incidences is seen (News TRP might be a reason as many new regional media houses are thirsty for public attention).*

According to Reporter/ copy writer of a vernacular language newspaper:

*When we talk and understand violence of Northeast, it is basically militancy related violence and political violence...and violence is being represented in bad light may be exaggeration.*

According to freelance journalist a former Northeast correspondent of an international public service broadcaster:

*Violence in northeast is excessively represented in media- local and mainstream both. Whether the violence in trouble torn Manipur or stray insurgency activities in Assam- they are always blown out of context giving the picture that Northeast is a violent war zone where people kill each other at the slightest of opportunity. But who shows the otherwise peaceful and mundane existence of the common man and his struggles to make ends meet? Yes, there are bomb explosions every now and then. But it happens everywhere...Delhi, Mumbai, Pune. When it happens in Northeast it is played out like everyday happening unlike in other places.*

**Beyond violence:** 6% respondents (Figure 3.14) opine that there is a need for change, need to look beyond violence in terms of representation of northeast as a whole. Other stories focusing on other aspects of the region need to be explored to portray appropriate image of the region for the world to read, see and perceive.

According to Producer (news) of regional language television news channel:

*As fourth pillar of our society media should also highlight the positive things about this North East like availability of natural resources, scope of tourism and industries, rich cultural heritage etc. that this part of country is endowed with.*

According to Correspondent of an English language newspaper from Assam:

*Most important stories are negated and only a certain type of stories is reported on and on. Issues related to environment or development is hugely ignored at times.*

According to Producer of DD News, Northeast Regional office:

*I do agree that Northeast is wrongly represented with exaggerations in media. Northeast may be seen as serenity, beauty and nature in abundance here. But on the contrary media reports project it as violent, unrestful and negative. We are living in Northeast, but what outsiders think thought shouldn't be our look out, but the region needs to be projected neutrally if not positively. We should project ourselves to the outside society in actual light to change perceptions and spread knowledge and understanding about Northeast. Only personal experience can make understanding of the locale, people, situation, traditions, religion etc possible. The media needs to adopt similar attitude to adopt and reflect for bettering the media scenario in the region and about the region.*

**Reaction against practice:** 4% respondents (Figure 3.14) showed displeasure in the way the region has been portrayed in media through mostly violence. There has already been too much of violence projection in the past. Thus there is a need felt currently as the responses emerge, to look beyond the violent projection of the region and focus on other aspects of the region, which include development, tourism, culture, traditions etc.

According to Freelance journalist reporting from Assam for national media houses:

*Violence in the Northeast is often being represented in a very intriguing manner. Separate media house tends to represent it in its own perceived way. I am, personally, against the way violence is being represented in most of the electronic media houses in this region.*

According to Production Engineer of a regional television news channel:

*There is a need to sensitise media regarding the impact and consequences of extensive reporting of violence from the region. The oblivion of the media makers regarding the perception such reports create and the consequent image building is worsening the situation for the state, the people and the entire community.*

According to Copy Editor of a regional vernacular language newspaper:

*It is good in some ways that the region is getting little media responses at the end but it is also true that it's getting covered for all the bad reasons. News that percolates out of the region is only negative. Other aspects hardly get covered and spread.*

**Professional training:** Reacting to the persistent representation of mostly violence in media from northeast, 2% respondents (Figure 3.14) pointed out at the need of trained journalists in the region. Apparently it is lack of proper training and desired

journalistic practices that have lead to violence being so crudely represented in media, both regional and national.

According to Editor of a regional vernacular language newspaper:

*Northeast journalists need to be trained and develop maturity to deal with crimes and violence. Many journalists get excited about reporting stories about violence without getting to the bottom of it. In the pursuit to report first and break stories to the audiences, often validating facts gets missed out by amateur journalists.*

**Immature journalism:** When it comes to reporting of violence, 3% respondents pointed at immature journalism being practiced in the region as the root cause behind only selective and extensive coverage of violence from the region by media.

According to CEO & Content Editor of a regional television news channel:

*To cite instances and examples there will be many but to sum up with the recent fallout in Assam's BTAD (2012), it is clear that most media houses were running to give news first and fast, showing old visuals as something that just happened. They use to brand news as Breaking Now, Breaking Visuals, First Visuals etc, to give the audience that something has just happened, which is misrepresentation of a story, which is sensitive and can spark off more violence. At such time, extra care should be taken, while you name a person killed in violence, as naming will result in identification and escalation of violence, which was communal and ethnic in nature.*

Citing the example of the mob violence instance in Assam (see Image 25, 26, 27) and referring to the immature media coverage where he claimed media was responsible for flaring up violence because of misreporting of facts and being judgemental towards the cause Freelance Journalist of Assam said:

*There is imbalance in the approach of reporting violence in Northeast. Many incidences of violence go unreported while many again receive huge mileage. Media should be alert and try to cover every violent incident in an objective way. Media most of times is very irresponsible and biased and negative while handling violence. For example the mob-violence of Adivasi in Beltola is a striking example of negative irresponsible journalism. The coverage in media was biased and ethical reporting was completely forgotten.*

**Appreciable:** Only 1% of respondents (Figure 3.14) were found to approve the way media has been performing in reporting violence from the region in its representations.

According to News-coordinator of a regional television news channel:

*I think media houses in the North East have done a brilliant job in representing violence*

*through news as it has a fixed mandate on the way things should be showed on screen. National media houses on very rare occasions pick up stories of violence from the Northeast. When it's a matter of national importance they do represent the region to quite an extent but very rarely. The G S Road incident or the BTAD violence may be seen as example of appreciable media coverage, media extensively reported, even reached the interiors and reported on incidents that could have been otherwise gone unnoticed by the entire world.*

Though a minor section of 7% of the respondents mention of the need to change the way media has been representing violence of the region and look beyond violent content only, most seem to give in to the existing trend. The satisfactory overtones (1% of respondents) on media representation of violence were directed towards merely gaining media space and time, with media houses accepting news from the region but with no comment on content and quality. The rest 99% of the respondents though accept violence to be the dominant content in media representations of Northeast giving various rationalisations for the same, but express displeasure.

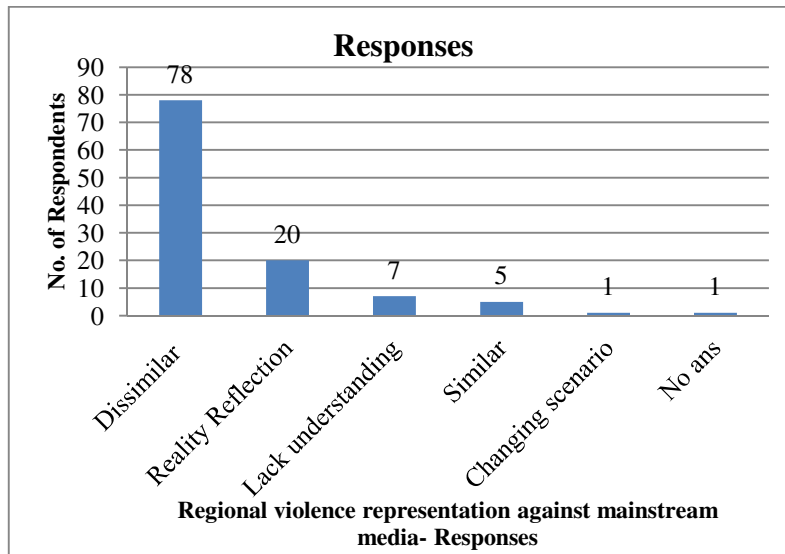
### **3.3.2 Regional Violence Representation against Mainstream Media: Northeast Nuances**

The term 'mainstream' seems problematic to many with the argument that the word itself alienates and sidelines the region as "non-mainstream", but the word is extensively used to describe the media outside the peripheral region serving the rest of the 'mainland' nation and the world. Popularly referred to as mainstream media, are both print and broadcast media houses, usually large news conglomerate with often distinctive power relations with the "government and powerful corporate and other lobbying entities" (Herman and Chomsky 289). In the present day context, mainstream media is widely understood to be the media houses located in the metros. While newspapers have editions from the metropolitan cities- Delhi, Bombay, Bangalore, Chennai or Kolkata mostly, with various other regional sub-editions; television channels have head offices with main production, broadcast and decision making based in mostly Delhi and Mumbai. Media representation of Assam or the entire Northeast in the mainstream media has become a matter of debate. The dispute is in considering news from the region newsworthy based on the news values, which the decision makers at the mainstream media offices perceive. Apparently Northeast remains marginal in coverages in mainstream media.

As discussed earlier (section 3.3) northeast acquires considerably limited and patterned projection in the media reports. Moreover considering the representation of only selective instances of violence, the disparity becomes more distinct while comparing coverage of conflict situations in the region to similar incidents in the rest of the country the so called or 'mainland' India in public consciousness. Representation of violence from the entire northeastern region with specific pockets, in media has surfaced to be a matter of concern as many believe that the representation is apparently dissimilar from the way it is usually done in the mainstream for other parts of the nation. About the region as representation in media is concerned, there are two prominent distinctive views on representation instances- one where respondents strongly believe that the northeast as a whole goes unreported and the other where respondents feel only selective information (authenticated as well as misreported) representing violence in the region gets projected as news.

Available literature suggests, there have been instances of violence in others states of India as well, Gujarat riots in 2002, 1984 anti Sikh riots, Kashmir and Punjab which may be compared to the situation of Assam and northeast as a whole (Baruah 1999, Rehman 2009, S. Kumar, Mochahari). Conflicts in the region are only different in the sense that Northeastern movements have not received much media attention like the others (Baruah 1999: 164).

The responses (Figure 3.15) on regional violence representation against mainstream media may be categorised as below:



**Figure 3.15: Responses on Regional Violence Representation against Mainstream Media**

**Dissimilar:** 70% respondents (Figure 3.15) opine that violence representation of the Northeastern region in media is unlike the way it is usually done in the mainstream for other regions. Apparently excessive violence and selective reporting has led to propagation of negative image of the region to the media consumers. Whereas violence occurrences of other regions are projected along with other incidences as well, the dissimilarity lies in the way only selective reporting occurs in case of Northeast about violence. The basic cause of the dissimilar treatment in media representations, according to few respondents, was Assam or Northeast as a whole being clubbed under less priority areas of the main stream media for coverage.

According to Production Engineer (News) of a regional television channel:

*The so called mainstream media, most of the time only covers violence in Northeast. In my perception it has so far knowingly or unknowingly created its image as a terrorist driven region across the mainstream India. While violence in northeast is given utmost priority in media and mostly exaggerated in representations, similar incidents do occur in other states as well which media does not play up like it does for Northeast.*

According to freelance journalist from Assam:

*Violence representation in the Northeast is vastly different from the way it is done in the mainstream as many of the electronic media houses here lack in fact-finding and proper ground reporting while stressing mostly on sensationalism.*

According to a Senior Copy Editor of an English language newspaper:

*The Northeast media keeps on dramatically repeating even the smallest (most of the times unimportant) aspects of a news story, which the mostly professional media of the rest of India thankfully overlooks.*

According to Producer (News) of a regional television news channel:

*National media perceives and presents North East India as a region vulnerable to various violent incidents like terrorism, ethnic clashes, problems in the border areas, illegal migrants.*

According to Feature writer of an English language newspaper:

*The use of lot of graphics, loud scary voiceovers and too many sound effects in the news packages of the regional broadcast media is way more than the national media.*

According to Assistant Producer (English News) of a regional television news channel:

*The main difference is that when the incident is from North-east it is more emphasized on the regional context. A bomb blast in Chennai for example will be a bomb Blast but in Northeast it will be Bomb Blast in Northeast. For this reason sometimes case of violence is also looked over as mundane affair.*

According to Correspondent of an English language newspaper from Assam:

*Mainstream news is not always projected as an isolated story. There are also other types of news from the mainstream that finds representation in the news, but in case of northeast other issues are mostly overshadowed. Besides there is seldom any follow up stories from the north eastern region unlike the mainstream news where follow ups and the consequent policy changes are also made visible in the media*

According to a freelance journalist of Assam, contributing to national media houses:

*Here in Assam, media is more insensitive towards victims. Many journalists lack the basic skill of reporting. They ask irrelevant questions without proper knowledge of the background of the incident and hence the versions of a single incident are different in different media. Very few journalists actually do proper research on their subjects before publishing or airing their stories.*

According to Sub-editor of an English language newspaper:

*The region is anyway viewed by an outsider as an exotic land with head-hunters and ULFA, most of whom do not even know the full form of the abbreviation. The representation is done in a way that lets people believe that it's nothing new to us but just another piece of news to them.*

According to News Producer of *Doordarshan News Guwahati*:

*Violence in northeast is represented by militants, insurgents, and border dispute, separatism; every clan wants its own freedom and wants separate statehood. The basic projection on the contrary should be irrigation, health, etc. for the benefit of the people. But from Northeast news are always on rape, corruption, political violence, mass violence. We are not represented the way we should be.*

According to Northeast Bureau Chief of an international news agency:

*When it comes to Northeast, it didn't manage to get a priority at national media if it is not extreme. In many cases it is seen that incidences of similar intensity but from other parts of the country get more airtime coverage & priority than similar intensity incidences from Northeast. In case of news from Northeast it is sometimes seen that even less significant news from elsewhere gets more airtime than the Northeast incidents. But, with time the scenario is changing showing some ray of hope for deserving representation of Northeast in mainstream media.*

According to Staff Reporter of a regional vernacular language newspaper of Assam:

*It is not different but since militancy violence is more in North east, it is different from rest of the country. But one this for sure is the representation is more on the negative angle for this region.*

Though another respondent, Assam Correspondent of a national newspaper with Guwahati edition, cited difference in the way violence was being covered from Assam in mainstream media, he clarified the reason behind the dissimilar reporting depending upon proximity area and priority news concept:

*It's very difficult to judge the differences between representations of violence in local media as against mainstream media. Even mainstream media is part of the same fraternity. However, a national daily or news channel has to deal with every important news from the world or nation and cannot concentrate on news from any one part of the nation; whereas a regional or local channel has the privilege of playing the local issues in a bigger way, covering many related issues and story angles.*

**Reality reflection:** 18% respondents (Figure 3.15) refer to representation of violence in media as reflection of real life happenings, definite and genuine violence situations in the region. Since reality is reflected in media and as the scenario is extremely volatile, representation also has to be similar. These responses establish that media acts only as a mirror of the society and in reflecting the reality the unpleasant truth of

the state is put forth for the media consumers by media makers. And thus is projected to the world an image of a disturbed, violent prone state, under the reign of terror.

According to Freelance journalist reporting Assam for various national print media houses:

*Northeast being a comparatively violent region, the representation too is comparatively violent-sensitive. Recovery of arms gets more space with bolder headlines; bomb hoax finds more timeslot with louder anchoring/reporting. Assam also figures mostly in news when there is violence actually happening around. No media creates stories, but media reports the reality.*

According to Senior Producer (News) of a regional television channel:

*It is not different but since militancy and violence is more in Northeast, it is different for rest of the country, but it is more negative. You still cannot blame the media for it, when the reality is unpleasant one has to report that unpleasantness only.*

**Lack understanding:** 6% respondents (Figure 3.15) refer to the media industries' lack of understanding of about the region and ground realities of the violence incidents of the region. As popularly believed and theoretically proven, for objective reporting on conflict it is necessary to report on causes of violence and also to provide a platform for solution of the conflict (Galtung) Media has to play an important role in understanding the ground reality, history, the present and also the future of the conflict and related violence. But since media lacks the understanding itself it becomes all the more difficult for it to uphold the complete truth for the consumers.

According to Producer of a regional television news channel:

*Northeast is a region filled with people coming from different tribes, speaking different language, having different cultural and social background. They need to understand in their own cultural and economic setting for better understanding. Moreover there is more number of militant groups in the region compared to the rest of the country. Therefore, any kind of violence needs to be handled with utmost care. Partial knowledge and street-smart reporting has made things worse for the region.*

**Similar:** 4% respondents (Figure 3.15) opine that representation of violence specific to the Northeast is similar to the way it is done in the mainstream media. As per respondents violence being the most preferred news content apparently seems to be extensively covered by media houses irrespective of the region of its origin.

According to Sub-editor of a national newspaper organisation:

*It is not very different in the mainstream media as well. Many incidents in the recent times came to the forefront because of public protests. A constant ranting is what it looks like on television most of the time.*

**Changing scenario:** 1% of the respondents (Figure 3.15) refer to the changing scenario in representation of violence. Though there seems to be disparity in the treatment of violence oriented news content from the region, respondents seem optimistic about changes taking place in journalistic practices regarding violence reporting.

According to CEO and Content Editor of a regional television news channel:

*Today TV channels and media houses are becoming sensitive to issues on coverage of violence. There are also issues and programmes coming up other than violence and it's a change for the good.*

As derived from responses and available literature, in mainstream media with its offices located at the metros- mostly Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore, Chennai and Kolkata, Northeast remains a marginal subject; mainly because of the geographical distance as well as the psychological barriers. The distinction in reporting of violence in the Northeast as compared to any other part of the mainland media may be seen with the magnitude of violence it requires to gain mainstream media space and time. Otherwise news items other than explicit violence often go uncovered and thus unnoticed by the rest of the world. As pointed out Gujarat riots received more media attention in comparison to Assam riots because of its proximity to Delhi and (Baruah 1999, Rehman 2009, S. Kumar, Sardesai, Mochahari etc.). Moreover reporting violence from Northeast remains stereotypical, either because of media negligence or lack of knowledge (Sanjib Barua, Sanjoy Hazarika, Wasbir Hussain, Subir Bhoumick etc)

Though significant amount of alteration in content and context in news from Northeast is not witnessed in mainstream media and violence dominates, little efforts from individual media houses are seen being made in the entertainment field where Northeast is seen beginning to be explored with focus on positive aspects like tourism, music, culture, traditions, etc. Though the reporting on violence seems to not undergo

much change, but television shows exploring other positive aspects have been explored by media houses. Moreover attempts have been made by authoritative bodies to publicise aspects of the region which would essentially be overlapped under the violence representations, to invite people to the region and to change perceptions. For instance the Ambubachi Mela in Assam had being widely advertised to boost tourism in the state (see Image 37, 38). On the other hand news reports on the same event (see Image 39) are seen raising security issues and portraying the event as a prospective site for extremist attack.

### **3.3.3 Violence over other Regional Aspects in News**

Undoubtedly violence dominates the media content, but significantly violent content in media has not only raise quantitatively over the years with media boom, media commercialisation and consumerism in the regional scenario, but also qualitatively with visuals, images and even texts becoming highly disturbing, graphic and detailed. It was unanimously agreed upon by respondents that regional violence has been immensely exaggerated by the media leaving other, genuine issues with little attention. Priority given to violence content in comparison to positive human interest stories or developmental stories, in news rather than other aspects of the region has always been a matter of concern. Though the unrest and social condition of the state might be to some extent responsible for dominance of violence content in media products, but the over-emphasise on violence in news sensationalised presentation, especially in television is for attracting quick attention undoubtedly.

The responses (Figure 3.16) on Violence over other regional aspects in news may be categorised as below:

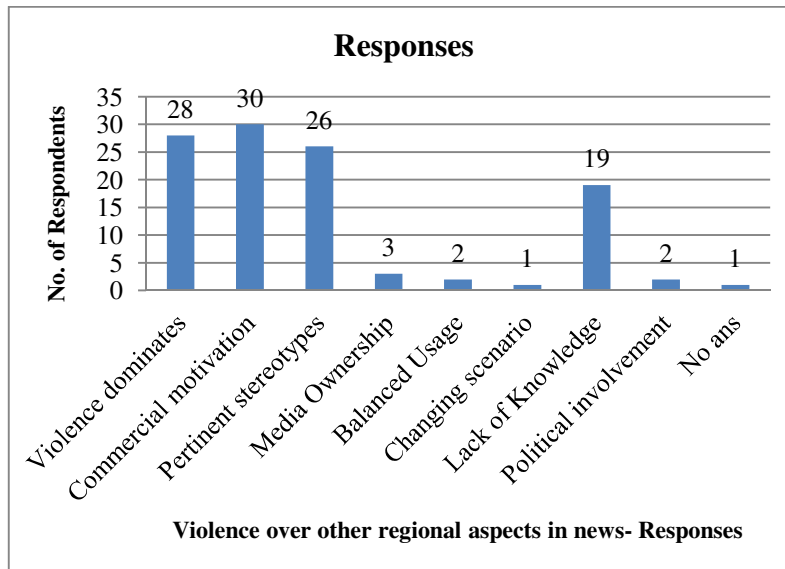


Figure 3.16: Responses on Violence over other Regional Aspects in News

**Violence dominates:** 25% respondents (Figure 3.16) said that priority is given to violence content in news rather than other aspects of the region. Apparently violence and crime stories always make for better scoop than other aspects. Media practitioners believe that representation of violence in media is justified in the prevalent media scenario of competition and consumerism. Negative news about violence is always given priority in comparison to positive and human interest stories in media. Violence dominates media content simply because violence as content is expected to be well accepted among the media consumers and

According to CEO and Content editor of a regional television news channel of Assam:

*Violence can run emotions high. As people are killed or an act of violence is reported, viewers, audience is automatically pulled in. And action always put our adrenaline high. If a road side quarrel generates a lot of attention, definitely, a TV showing violence is surely going to get more attention.*

According to Freelance journalist from Assam:

*Violence get a priority over other content related to other aspects of the region. I believe it is because violent content interest people and masses keep track on the flow of incidence. Hence media gets its ready audience for few days. TRP matters for the business of any news channel and circulation figures matters for print media.*

According to Producer (News) of a regional television channel broadcasted from Guwahati:

*Violence in any form will always have some influence in any form of media, because the media understands how to keep their audiences busy. Therefore, the rule applies to north east India too. Most of the violence issues depicted in media are not all correct. People are made to believe what the media say are true. If we particularly look again to the northeast it is more complex, because people have a notion that north east is an insurgency infected states so violence is bound to happen. People in the rest of the country have been fed with such false conceptions about northeast India where otherwise these states are almost same with the other states of the country as far as violence is concerned, though little care needs to be taken because of the existence of the militant groups.*

**Media Ownership:** Considering the current situation of violence and negative news dominating media, media ownership was pointed by 3% of respondents as one of the influencing factors in determining the content and presentation of news. As Senior Correspondent, of an English national newspaper, with Guwahati edition cites:

*Negative news is always given priority other than any other aspect of information from the state. For example during the state elections in 2010 the news channels harped on rigging and sporadic untoward incidents in some pockets, rather than highlighting the fact that it was by and large peaceful election where the young people of the state came out in great numbers to cast their votes. There are only two ways of journalism in the state- one for the government (by media houses owned by ministers and their family members) and against the government which means blind criticisms of anything the government and associated organizations do. There is no middle ground. This is hurting the whole journalism sector in the state. Likewise there are definite political gains and financial achievements attained from the conflicts and violence projections of the state.*

**Commercial motivation:** News production in present day context is largely understood to be commercialised in order to attract mass audiences in return of profit, as is the case of any other commodity production in market. 27% respondents (Figure 3.16) point at commercial motive behind media production for excessive representation of violence gaining precedence over other regional aspects in news. Apparently violent content is broadly understood as appropriate for fetching TRPs/ hiking up circulation numbers of newspaper in comparison to other news item.

According to a Senior News Reporter of a regional television channel:

*Violence content obviously gets more media attraction than any other aspect of the region. Simply put a blast killing few people is obviously a better news item than a story on prospective tourism in the state.*

According to Freelance journalist of Assam:

*A specific priority is given to violent content as it is an easy means of earning TRPs mostly by sensationalizing the incident.*

According to Freelance journalist of Assam:

*Violent content interest people and masses keep a track on the flow of incidence. Hence media gets its ready audience for few days. TRP matters for the business of any news channel and circulation figures matters for print media.*

**Pertinent stereotypes:** 23% respondents (Figure 3.16) feel that history of militancy and strong stereotypes held by people and furthered by media have been one of the major reasons why violence in the region is given priority in media than other aspects. The region has been identified with persistent conflicts and violence for over a period of time, and as news content of violent activities makes sensational reading/viewing and thus sells. Respondents believe the region makes saleable stories only when they are in tune to the perceptions media has already created, spread and sustained.

According to Producer (news) of a regional television news channel:

*Priority is always given to violence content in news rather than other aspects of the region. Since Northeast is a geographically remote region with lack of proper transport connectivity and unrestful image, very less people actually know the place and the people. The history of numerous underground outfits may be another reason though there is peace in the region at present.*

According to Senior Copy Editor of an English language regional newspaper:

*It is mostly due to the innumerable acts of terror by various extremist groups and organisations in the region in the past and are still continuing though extremely fewer in number of cases, that violence has become the leading content of news from the state. These fetch TRPs/ hike up circulation numbers of newspaper.*

According to Sub-editor of a regional newspaper in English:

*If you are talking about National media, then violence is given more precedence, mostly because of the age-old stereotypes regarding the region and its importance. The Northeast has always been neglected by the National media, so any coverage will be done on the lines of the image the National media has formed of the region*

According to Desk Editor of an English language newspaper published from Assam:

*It is a widely known fact that Assam in day-to-day knowledge is known far more for its violent/militant problem than due to, say, Sattras or tea gardens – and that has been the years of media representation of the condition of Assam. So a Paresh Barua would be given far more priority than an Uddhav Bharali or Reema Kagi.*

Reflecting upon how representation of the region through mostly violence in media has been keeping in tune with the prejudices and in turn overlooking at other aspects of the region, a freelance reporter from Assam says:

*Yes priority is given to violence reporting in the valley than any other coverage than most discussed and elite interested politics, culture or tourism and wildlife because of the valley's history on terrorism. The entire Northeast region has been in the grasp of terrorism which caused havoc in the valley and took many lives. In fact news stories get coverage on what at present ULFA or other terrorist leaders are doing even if they keep themselves restrained from violence for a period as per their pact with Government. The media tries to show the terrorists in the realm of human interest stories. The flow of news on violence will have huge impact of society affecting the way people think and behave. People may safeguard themselves.*

News values are fundamental to understanding news production and the choices that editors and other journalists face when deciding upon one piece of information being news while another is not. Violence or conflict is undeniably accepted as news considering its so called news value. Most often representation of violence in media is found to be more of the representations of the “pre-occupations, interests and values” of the journalist’s consumer society or atleast the dominant groups comprising the society (Carruthers 17). On similar note it becomes decisive as to who in media decides what the audiences want to know; and what and how much should be let known to them. The news producers have their own opinions and mostly follow the patterns of representation being followed in the past and in trend in mainstream. Diverging from the known and accepted is taken as possible damage for the media house. As it is popularly understood and believed defying the norm might lead to loosing viewers/ readers and thus it might affect the media business adversely.

**Balanced Usage:** 2% respondents (Figure 3.16) deny violence been given priority in media texts over any other regional aspect.

According to News coordinator of a regional television news channel:

*Violence is violence. On a daily basis there are over 12 reports from all over the region that deals with various sorts of violence. We tend to pick up only a couple maybe that we think the people of the state or the region should know.*

**Changing scenario:** 1% of the respondents (Figure 3.16) pointed at the change in scenario

*Earlier it was mostly violence but slowly and steadily positive news or other stories are also featuring in the news. Newsmakers from the field of music, arts and culture get a huge space in this. Maybe the region itself is becoming more vocal, social media has acted as a huge eye-opener for the other parts of the country and youths of the region are themselves engaged in the media industry.*

**Lack of knowledge:** 17% of the respondents (Figure 3.16) were of the opinion that lack of knowledge about the entire northeastern region as a whole and the popular mainstream notion that Northeast is less popular among wider audiences was apparently one of the major reasons pointed at for violence being selected for media representations leaving aside most other regional aspects.

According to Production Engineer (News) of a regional television news channel:

*Northeast is a geographically remote region and many of its places does not have transport connectivity like train, flight, roads etc. a very few things are known by the people who have not been there.*

According to Correspondent of a regional newspaper published in English:

*Violence in north east is usually given the top most priority in terms of selection of the news items. The reason that can be attributed for such a response is because a huge majority of the audience population viewing mainstream news comes from outside northeast so other news associated with north eastern states find less audience. Most media houses target the central, northern and parts of southern and eastern belts, since their idea is to rope in more target audience while north eastern states are often ignored on most occasions unless a story has the magnitude to attract national or international attention.*

**Political involvement:** 2% respondents (Figure 3.16) pointed at the political involvement in media that leads violence been given priority in news media texts.

Echoing similar views Producer of Regional News Unit of *Doordarshan News* states:

*Though the unrest and social condition of the state might be to blame to some extent, but the over emphasize on violence in news –especially in TV- is for eyeball grabbing and cheap*

*sensationalisation. For example during the state elections in 2010 the news channels harped on rigging and sporadic untoward incidents in some pockets, rather than highlighting the fact that it was by and large peaceful election where the young people of the state came out in great numbers to cast their votes. There are only two way of journalism in the state- one for the government (by media houses owned by ministers and their family members) and against the government which means blind criticisms of anything the government does. There is no middle ground. This is hurting the whole journalism sector in the state.*

Respondents typically cited three primary aspects which are instrumental in priority given to reports on instances of violence selectively ignoring various other aspects of the region- commercial motivation, violence dominates consumer consciousness and pertains to prevailing stereotypical perceptions. Increasing news conglomerations and intervention of big media conglomerates into the region through media collaborations with regional media houses, intensifies the demand for instantly acceptable and saleable news reports. Thus exploiting the already existing trend of reporting of violence for perceived instant users' gratification is done either by propagating fear or sympathy among the consumers and thus sell the story. The reason that violence sells media products apparently cited by respondents is because that is exactly what the mainstream desires and accepts.

One of the primary reasons for violence being the dominant media content from the region may be said to be media ownership influencing the media content. Research evidences show that media ownership has significant influence over media content. Media concentration often results in "over-representation of those forms of output favoured by dominant media owners" (Doyle 19). Though comparatively fewer respondents were vocal about the ownership and pressure executed over content selection and representation, apparently the media to some extent is unwilling to change the predominant violence representation because of the authoritative pressure or political involvement in journalistic practices. Concentrations of media ownerships narrow the range of voices that predominate in the media and consequently understood to pose a threat to the interests of the society. The relationship between media ownership, commercial media content, prevalent stereotypes hampers diverse representation of the region and newer avenues from being explored. And thus results in selective representation of the region through violence mostly.

### 3.3.4 Selection or Omission of Violence Content in Media

Representation of violent content in media requires selection or omission of certain content, a kind of censorship before putting it for mass consumption. However some see censorship in media content as a threat to the concept of ‘freedom of expression’ of media. As far as norms for selection or omission of violence content in media is concerned, media follows the popular saying, if something “bleeds, it leads”; with more violent content being selected for representation and less perceived insignificant violence being kept out of media texts.

The responses (Figure 3.17) on norm for Selection or omission of violence content in media may be categorised as below:

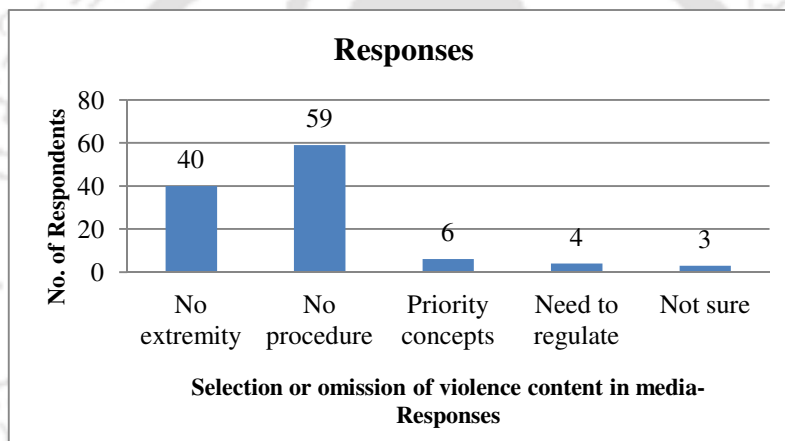


Figure 3.17: Responses on Norm for Selection or Omission of Violence Content in Media

**No extremity:** Regarding selection or omission of violent content in media, 36% respondents (Figure 3.17) opine that too much violence needs to be avoided in media representations. But on the contrary the media practice is not the same. While some feel the need for censorship regarding violent content, most give in to the market demands and industry practices.

According to News Production Engineer of a regional television news channel:

*Definitely there are norms for selection or omission of violence content in media but very few responsible media house regulate such norms.*

Agreeing to the existence of procedure regarding selection of violent content, freelance journalist of the region says:

*There are specific norms and regulations. If one browses through the pages of media rules and regulations laid by the BCCC, one is ought to find the basic guidelines and regulations. But in regular practice all these are not at all followed.*

According to Sub-editor of a regional newspaper:

*Yes, gory incidents should not be shown or highlighted, dead bodies should be omitted, sexual violence should be blurred and names and faces of victims should not be published or shown without permission of the victim or the family if the victim is dead.*

According to CEO and Content Editor of a television news channel:

*We don't name people killed in violence, if the origin of the violence is communal in nature. If the act of violence is a quarrel or a fight between two, we try to hide the identity of the person in concern and just report the story. And it is seen that the article or report does not hurt the sentiments of any audience and be neutral about it.*

There are certain norms such as the effect of the story on the viewers and readers and the benefit of the channel or newspaper by publishing or telecasting of that news.

**No procedure** (more the better): 53% respondents (Figure 3.17) suggest that there is no norm followed by media houses or individual media practitioners when it comes to inclusion of violence content in media. Respondents believe the more the scale of violence the more it is exposed and explored by media.

According to a freelance journalist associated with nation media house:

*The bigger the violence (in scale and consequence) the greater is the news impact expected. Although there is no such norm regarding the content, murders and communal violence would gain selection any day over petty domestic violence.*

According to Freelance journalist reporting for national news channels:

*Media is driven by commercial market driven dynamics wherein it all depends upon what sells in the market. News is shown or reported which readers want to read or know. Hence, violence is increasingly reported from northeast India.*

According to Senior Correspondent of a regional television channel:

*There does not seem to be any specific norm regarding the selection or omission of violence content in media. But off course more importance is usually given to news which is more sensationalised or has reference to big names or big cities. Apart from this it could however be said that violence associated with big cities find more exposure then those originating in the remote or distant places.*

According to veteran Freelance journalist of Assam:

*However certain vernacular media seems to be sympathetic or unsympathetic, according to their respective policies and target audiences, towards news reporting on migrants from*

*Bangladesh or former East Pakistan, while certain others on migrants from Hindi regions of India.*

According to Staff reporter of a regional vernacular language newspaper:

*It should follow news values and ethical dimensions. The reporter should keep in mind the betterment and sentimentality of a country than a region or part.*

According to Senior Copy Editor of an English newspaper:

*Generally, media houses used to decide against publishing gruesome photos of victims or detailed graphic descriptions about the event in gory terms earlier. However, TRP and circulation competitions have changed this reservation.*

According to News Coordinator of a regional television news channel:

*Usually petty crimes like theft, burglary etc do not make it into the content. Crimes of grievous nature make it to the news based on the circumstances and its implication on the society.*

According to Producer (News) DD News, Guwahati Office:

*We will have to be non-prerogative to any subject of violent content. There is no way no selection. Only the mental health and conscience of the person in charge of the particular news should decide how much importance to be given to the event subject matter. We should not exaggerate the particular subject ... but we should be authentic and truthful to the subject. And it should not disturb anyone, any community, any religion. We should not be biased.*

Apparently 'more the better' guideline rules TRP and circulation, national coverage and also media consumers; therefore the same guideline is used for justifying selection of violent content in media as well. Thus to keep track with the increasing commercial attitude in media, and also to attract a large number of audiences' more of violent content is incorporated in media texts, especially in regard to Assam or Northeast.

**Priority concepts:** 5% respondents opined that there are certain concepts which are always given priority in news rather than others. Here comes in the concept of news value. News values are certain general guidelines or criteria used by media outlets to determine the representation of any story (event, place, people, incident etc.). Not only do these characteristics qualify a story to be new-worthy, they also determine the amount of importance to be given to the news, with space and time allotments. Certain issues of mass violence, urban contexts are often understood to be TRP or circulation grabbers, and thus considered newsworthy too.

According to Producer (Hindi language News bulletin) of a regional news channel:

*Urban incidents are given more importance than those from rural areas. An incident associated with/ influencing high profile people (political/ cultural/ social/ industrial), urban areas is blown out of proportion whereas incidents related to common people rarely gets coverage.*

According to Producer/ Anchor of News of a regional news channel:

*The violent content must not incite more violence if there is a chance of it than either it is omitted or the content is regulated and toned down.*

**Need to regulate:** Reacting to the present media scenario prevalent in the region and limitless extent to which violence is represented in media, 4% respondents (Figure 3.17) strongly feel that there needs to be a regulation body.

*As far as I am aware there no law as such for the omission of violence content in media. The press council of India can play a vital role in such activities and govern the contents of the media thoroughly so that the institutes that violate these principles are punished. There are some ethical human values which all civilized person of the society possess and understands.*

### 3.3.5 Modes of Media and Violence Representation Strategies

Talking of various modes of media (print, television and the web) the strategies are also different regarding representation of violence. The basic variation lies in the target consumers, their characteristics and the process and technicalities of production which are different for each of the media modes. Whereas visuals and presentation style form the crux of television, writing hogs the limelight in print media along with still images, and instant interactive news is most important part for the new media.

The responses (Figure 3.18) on Modes of Media and violence representation strategies may be categorised as below:

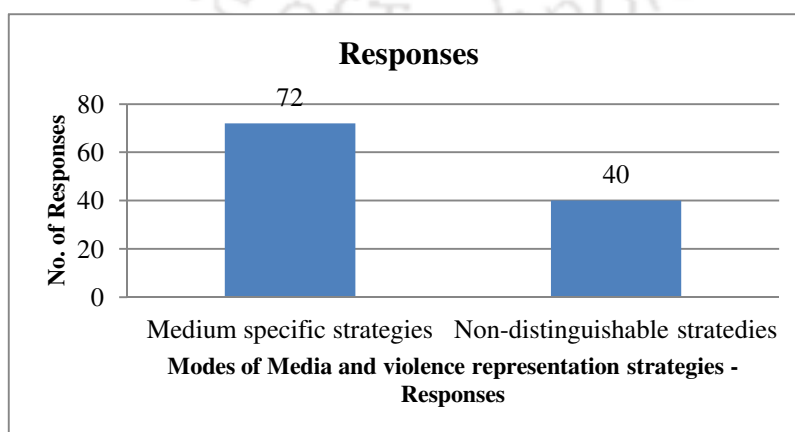


Figure 3.18: Responses on Modes of Media and Violence Representation Strategies

**Medium specific strategies:** Reflecting views on modes of media and violence representation strategies, majority of 64% respondents (Figure 3.18) opined that various modes of media, mainly print, television and the web, have different strategies regarding violence representation; mainly because of dissimilarity in technology and target audience groups that needs to be catered to. But the underlying fact remains, in case of newspapers and television, that violence is exploited to the utmost possibility for commercial gains and grabbing consumers' attention for the same. Violence reporting remains same for web news portals and also web versions of newspapers or television channels. While web provides a broader range of issues diverse opening with unlimited publishers and varied views and counter views, in case of television and newspapers a controlled production group decides upon the content.

Respondents believe that television, the electronic media has more potential to cause damage to the society rather than print. Print (newspapers and news magazines) is more refrained in representation of violence because of space constrains and ample time that it gets in hand to make decisions, from production to release giving ample scope for decision making and editing. On the other hand web has the potential to cater to the information needs and wants of a varied group of audience with a large producer group as well. But because of public ownership there is possibility of message reaching fast and even counter arguments, contradictions, corrections and modifications done faster by everyone than in the case of television and print.

Regarding dealing with violence, giving different reasons for doing so, from commercialisation, consumerism, competition, pressure from authorities, to public demand and their gratification, all respondents agree to have been playing up violence related messages in news media. Only difference is the technique and design.

According to News Producer (Assamese news) of a television news channel:

*These entire three platforms can represent the violent content in different ways. The most important thing is to understand which of them is more effective in representing the violent content. For example print can only use words with pictures to represent the violent news while television can send out moving images along with the audio and text which in turn can have more effect on the viewers. Internet can be one important source for sending such messages but how many of us always use internet to look for such content. Strategies may be different and*

*also the effect on the mass may have different levels but violence is always present in any form of media.*

According to Anchor and Desk Editor of a Regional television news channel of Assam:

*Electronic or broadcast media have the advantage of immediacy, and as such LIVE interactions from ground zero with the studio and/or experts and shocking footage played repetitively with On Screen Voice Over's makes a far more impact on the audience, while print media has the advantage of a calculated and carefully studied presentation of the violence – and its reports are far more wholesome. Meanwhile, web media takes from both and the competition, more often than not, is as to which online news website can publish a story faster than its competitors.*

According to Freelance journalist of Assam:

*Strategies are different regarding representation of violence. Web so far appears to be more objective than the other two counterparts. Television gives more views than news.*

Though the approaches are different but content in majority to attract and hold on consumers is violence. It depends on time and situation how the projection of the events or the occasions is being done by the respective media. There are specific scopes and limitations for various modes though. Print media can only show the visuals in static mode, and news is confined within the given space. Thus violence cannot be presented in *big-flashy* way as is possible for other media, especially television, which along with having the visual and audio support, also has graphical support to its representation. Thus recreating violence, influencing audiences and creating or breaking perceptions is easier for the television. Similar are instances of web journalism also as most of the newspapers and television news channels publish news online. While the approach to news is often distinguished for the web, the content more or less remains concentrated on violence when it comes to projection of Northeast (see Image 6).

According to respondents from print media:

*Print covers the main details and the human aspects making it less sensational, TV exaggerates the violence often causing its spill over, Web propagates the news further and with video streaming and all, it can equally be damaging.*

*Print appears to be more accommodating of representation of violence rather than television which is more TRP hungry, while the web has its specified target audience as young and more*

*educated section who enjoy the facility of choosing which news they want to view. Hence variations are usually apparent in terms of representation.*

Respondents from the television industry do agree to television representation of violence being more acceptable and influential because of the audio-visual nature of the media. Regarding representation of violence, television can be fast, informative as well as damaging to some extent. Some specific responses of respondents are as below:

*Television is more sensational and regional TV channels in Guwahati largely do not follow any editorial ethics while representing violence on television.*

*Newspapers mostly rely on facts. Because of the nature of the medium, it cannot go beyond plain facts whereas television channels have a chance of playing it up and make it appealing as well, which in many cases have led people to form strong opinions too. Web also has its space to be analytical and so do magazines, but television has a larger scope to play the story up and also be manipulative.*

*Television being audio-visual with maximum impact value, violence is represented in it more vividly and mostly live. Blast scenes or dead bodies are common. Crime shows are also favourites in programming content. Public ownership or/and interactive feedback of content in web helps in diverse representation of everything including violence.*

*Print is a silent media, only the person who wants or is interested in the matter can read, see pictures and if not interested nobody can compel anyone to be part of the news. The same lies for web as well. Now for television, especially the so called "paid channels" repeatedly show particular subject with vested interest. Sometimes knowingly and sometimes unknowingly, as they are compelled to do it because owners of the media houses politically relate with some sections. But still in media there are organisations who are different from the others as they follow the norms of the constitution where it is where freedom of speech in its true sense.*

### **3.3.6 Projection of Northeast: Trends in Representation**

Coverage of Northeast in media reflects certain kind of selective and patterned representation. According to the responses gathered and available literature, it is evident that Northeast and Assam in particular has been represented in media mostly through violent reporting, creating a patterned image. Now with such repeated representation in media in practice for long, a certain pattern can be said to have emerged. Now the question arises if such representation patterns result in any

emergence of trend; and if such patterns have undergone any change or shift in due course of time with growing media industry and changing society. Media representation patterns with violence as the prime focus of the industry apparently has seen no major improvement in selection and presentation even with the change in media scenario.

The responses (Figure 3.19) on Projection of northeast: Trends in representation may be categorised as below:

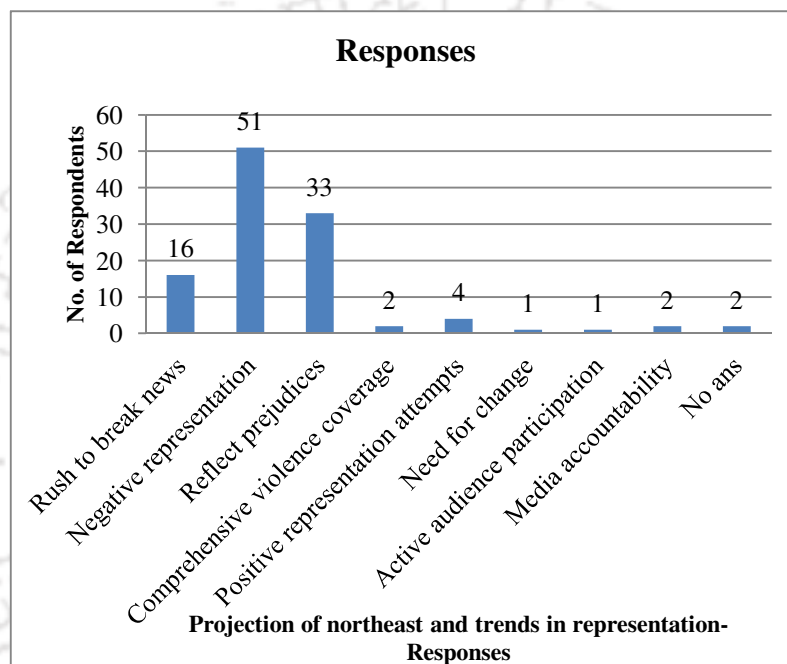


Figure 3.19: Responses on Projection of Northeast: Trends in Representation

Analysing the way media has been projecting the northeastern region as a whole it is seen that certain patterns of projection emerge. The emerging trends in media have been identified by the respondents as the *Breaking News*, negative stories, stereotypical projection, when it comes to representation patterns of northeast. In the commercialised media industry only violence and similar stories of unrest in the region gets priority over other news items, reflecting a similar pattern in homogeneous products with similar themes, uniform treatment, presentation and content as a whole. Whatever perception the people outside the region have of the region is nothing but a significant contribution of the media. And thus the media is seen at fault completely for any kind of patterned stereotypical projection of the region.

A section of respondents though scant (1%) also feel the need for change in the existing trend to change the gloomy media scenario and the inappropriate projection of the region. Attempt towards positive representation and highlighting other neglected and ignored subjects about the region is seen to be a useful tactics to change the existing trend of negativity and violence. Another minor section of respondents also sense a recent imminent change in the representation patterns.

**Rush to break news:** 14% respondents out of 112 interviewed (Figure 3.19) accept that with competition and increased pace of newsgathering and broadcasting, especially for the television industry, only a certain kind of patterned information mostly violence oriented, has been percolating out of the region which is apparently in accordance with the long existing trend of media representation. Media makers rush to make the news big and grab attention of a larger audience.

According to Freelance Journalist from Assam:

*Lately, there has been this latest trend of reporting first or the rush to break the news without confirming the genuineness of the incident / news.*

**Negative representation:** 46% responses (Figure 3.19) were found to considered projection of northeast in media being done in a certain patterned manner, with generally 'negative' and 'selective' representation of events. Archival reports, literature and media representatives state that of all the information from the region that percolates into news reports to be served to a larger set of audiences, through print, electronic media are reports on broadly based on terrorist activities, illegal immigration from Bangladesh, communal or ethnic clashes. These selective kind of news information are constantly chased by the mainstream media along with the full-blown support from regional media houses and individual practitioners.

According to Sub-editor of a regional newspaper published in English:

*There is negative representation of the Northeast in the media (national), where developments and the achievement of the people of this region are hardly given any time or space in the media. But in the regional papers and channels, both the sides are well covered.*

According to Producer of a regional television news channel:

*North East as a whole is portrayed as a militant affected area. Hardly have we ever seen a positive angle story from the northeast.*

According to News Coordinator of a regional television news channel:

*The North East has always been neglected by the national media who are busy most of the time with what's happening in Delhi. Until and unless there is something major happening in the region the national media houses tend to ignore the region.*

According to Freelance journalist based in Delhi reporting Assam:

*Its only violence, the trend has been escalating with more violence and affecting a large number of people. More the victims bigger is the trackable story.*

According to freelance journalist of Assam reporting for several regional media houses:

*Northeast anyways has very little representation in national media, but whenever represented, the region comes across as a very restless region (with news likes bomb blasts, ethnic violence etc). Hence in national media no major trend is followed. Expect the fact that news from northeast generally doesn't get any reportage with no major trend followed.*

According to Copy Editor of a vernacular language newspaper organization:

*Other parts of India perceive Northeast as a violence prone zone which is struggling through Bangladeshi intruders, violence, erosion of wild life etc. Northeast is highlighted more in negative light due to prevalent violence, rampant corruption, natural calamities etc.*

According to Deputy Director (Regional News Unit), Doordarshan News, Guwahati:

*Northeast in news means only depressing news- terrorist activities, protests against army atrocities, blasts etc. Private news channels and newspapers refuse to look beyond negative occurrences. This negativity is the trend oblate.*

Referring to a revelation done by a survey conducted by an individual organization, a Freelance journalist and Editor of the current affairs magazine said:

*A survey (2010) by voluntary association Jeevan Initiative based on content analysis of Assamese media showed that 85% of front-page news space was occupied by negative news. This is the trend leading to a perception that Assam and the region at large is full of negative happenings.*

**Reflect Prejudices:** 29% respondents (Figure 3.19) refer to the patterned projection of the region in media which reflect the strong prejudices that have persisted for long in media sensibilities.

According to CEO and Content editor of a regional television news channel:

*I will say perception is one factor, which influences mainstream media, while they report Northeast, of course things are changing now. Most journalists perceive things to be the way they think, which should not have been the case. Journalists should not perceive but report on facts and what they learn or find out.*

According to Editor of an English language newspaper organisation:

*It is apparent that the whole nation thinks northeast to be a secluded land, along with the mainstream media, with frequent occurring severe violence and acts of terrorism; happenings very unique and particular to the region. The trend followed so far in media representations has been in attempting to bring to fore incidents which reflect these strong prejudices of media makers as well as media consumers. There is no scope for change or shift in trend of this patterned projection.*

**Comprehensive violence coverage:** 2% respondents (Figure 3.19) apparently referred to the change in media scenario and shift in media trends in reporting northeast. The long followed trend in media representations were found to be revolving around conflict and violence involving and affecting masses, acts of terrorism, ethnic clashes and others. But the recent shift referred to by respondents in reportage from the region, especially Assam, is apparently from militancy and related forms of violence to violence of another kind at individual or gender level. These include domestic violence, atrocities or crime against women, etc.

According to Regional Correspondent of a national newspaper with Guwahati edition:

*As militancy related violence has come down in recent time and domestic or mob violence has submerged from the society, media has also shifted its perception and focus too.*

According to Copy editor of a regional Newspaper organisation:

*Violence against women is getting momentum in terms of cases being reported and gaining media space. When there is no actual violence happening gender violence is always happening for the media. But this has further removed Assam from the national media scenario.*

**Positive representation attempts:** 4% (Figure 3.19) respondents pointed at the positive representation attempts being made in the media industry though at a very subtle level and seem to be optimistic about the role of media in exploring newer avenues from the region and overcoming the violence reign in and outside media representations.

According to Assistant Producer (English News) of a regional news television channel:

*North East is portrayed as a militant affected area. However, with involvement of local people in mainstream media and also with few famous personalities who have brought laurels to the region the image has definitely improved, to name a few Marry Kom, Zubeen Garg, Mamoni*

*Raisom Goswami. Also a handful of entrepreneurs have contributed a lot to improve perception about North East through their endeavours in the area of Tourism, Textile etc.*

According to Senior-editor of a regional television news channel:

*I think the diversity of Northeast culture needs to be portrayed/ highlighted strongly because the common perceptions associated with it are disturbing. We can focus on more positive things like culture, tradition, tourism etc. but we tend to overlook these and concentrate on violence only. Oflate attempts are being made at individual levels of regional journalism for changing the media perception as well as mainland perception about the region other than just being focused on violence.*

Referring to the other aspects other than violence that are getting reflected in media respondents agreed the process of change is rather slow as any incident of violence often undermines all other aspects and is extensively played up by media. Still a very small section of respondents comprising of only 4% of the entire population, seem optimistic about the change in media patterns of violence which apparently is evident with certain efforts by individual media practitioners.

**Need for change:** 1% of the respondents (Figure 3.19) referred to the need for change in stereotypical projection of Northeast. Responses were more on suggestive note with media practitioners citing the need for change in media representations.

According to correspondent of English language newspaper published from Assam:

*North east as a region cannot surely be presented as a homogenous representation. The entire region has innumerable diversities, so to come up with a fixed and definite pattern would be fruitless. However if amendments' are to be suggested for defining any representation then it could be clearly said that more exposure should be given to the region then simply projecting unrests, calamities or violent upheavals. Besides the regular run of the mill stories, exposure should be given to offbeat stories which have a distinct flavour of the regions and also follow ups on issues which are on the news should be done. This can remove the feeling of being type casted or misrepresented and open way for understanding the origin and violence in the north eastern regions.*

**Active audience participation:** Another 1% respondent (Figure 3.19) even pointed at the necessity of active audience participation in discarding the prevalent violence patterned news trends can prove to be a game changer in the representation of the region.

According to a respondent from *Doordarshan*, Regional News Unit Guwahati Office:

*Participation of the people from the community is essential in producing news stories and adequate technical support should reach for capacity building of such media houses and individuals. People should be more aware, not only people of the region but also outside. Locals living outside should play an equally important role. With increase awareness among the*

**Media accountability** – 2% respondents (Figure 3.19) held the media responsible for extensively covering instances violence selectively in respect to the region. Apparently media effort should be for informing and educating the media consumers and not stereotypically branding regions as violent or terror prone.

According to News Producer of a regional television news channel:

*Most of the problem lies in us I mean to say, the local media houses for that matter. The local media houses should play a positive role in depicting the real about our region. They should have some programs about this region through which we can project the region in a positive manner. But the fact is that they also behave the same as the national news channels. There are instances where reports of this region are being prepared by someone in Delhi and the local media using it the way it is said from the Capital without even knowing and understand the truth. They talk about national news channels not depicting northeast in proper manner but they themselves are involved in such activities in the run to attain more TRP rating. We can change the notion of the people only if we ourselves start something good for our own. This does not mean that all the news channel of the northeast do not depict northeast in a proper manner but there has to be some consistency only then things will change for the good of all.*

Discarding the prevailing trend of media violence in representations, Senior Producer of *Doordarshan News* (Regional News Unit) points at various neglected media issues which though do not fall under popular media trends have been touched upon by media, but in trying to find and project undercurrents of violence and conflict. He apparently tries to figure out what exactly goes wrong in the prevalent stereotypical projection of Northeast as a whole and trends in media representation as follows:

*Militancy, insurgency apparently becomes the primary focus in national mainstream media regarding Northeast when looking for story selection. But the basic amenities and requirements are again not adequately projected in media. The basic roots of insurgency, the why's, how's and what's regarding the so called 'insurgents', 'militants' or 'extremists' are never addressed the way it should be by the media. It is essential to find out why they are with guns and not with roses. Requirements such as health, education, employment, and natural resources - local representation should comprise media texts. Even though government has given so many facilities to the tribals of the region, how far are they implemented? The basic benefits should*

*reach the target but why it is diverting. What is causing militancy needs to be covered and not what is militancy causing. Such issues are important which not usually projected by media. Lot of insurgent group come to negotiation tables and are having ceasefire rule with government of India. This is a brighter side of a society. Guns cannot solve the problem but negotiations and peace will bring stability, development of the people of Assam and Northeast. So media should highlight how the surrendered people came to mainstream and become the part of government of India. It is high time media should try and focus on issues of development, upliftment of ethnic tribals, demands and rights of the people needs to be addressed. Basically looking beyond violence is essential and focus should be on solution finding and tourism, serenity beauty of the region should not be overpowered by any other thing or issue. As source of income is limited, vast scope of tourism, publicity to world, really needs to be highlighted.*

As respondents pointed at more of a negative trend in media representations, and patterned reporting of selective instances of violence only, it was derived that while various aspects of the region are covered only giving them insurgency angle, most news reports are down calculations of all happenings and events in mere facts and figures. The projection of northeast and trends in representation may be said to be glorification of violence and trivialisation of content. Only fewer respondents expressed desire for the existing trend to change for improvement and development of the region through media representations. Media may also play equally important role in modifying perceptions.

With the popular trend of non-stop breaking and exclusive news stories, violence is comprehended to have more news and visual value as it According to general understanding there are certain advantages of representing violence through explicit and graphic details in media. Apparently glorification of explicit violence intensifies sense of fear or sympathy among its consumers. In both cases audiences are expected to want to know more and thus consume more of the media product fulfilling the commercial desires of the media outlets. This trend in media of perceived acceptance of violence is often used by various groups, mostly political or extremist groups who resort to violence to get noticed by mass media and thus reach out to a wide audience which otherwise would not have been achievable.

### 3.3.7 Representation Pattern of Northeast: Rational

As derived from the previous section the most popular trend of violence dominating media content and no attempt made by media to alter prevailing trends. The pattern of representations in media seem to not undergo much change primarily because alterations and experimentations with content, as perceived by media makers, might challenge popular perceptions of the media consumers. In respect to reporting violence from Assam and the entire Northeast the media perception goes as- news other than violence, not dealing with conflict or security issues will not raise curiosity among media consumers or interest them, thus failing to generate desired revenue of the media production. Thus echoing the views of experts “the content of news remains unchanged because it is shaped by the commercial and political interest” (Lynch 20).

The responses (Figure 3.20) on causes responsible for representation pattern of Northeast may be categorised as below:

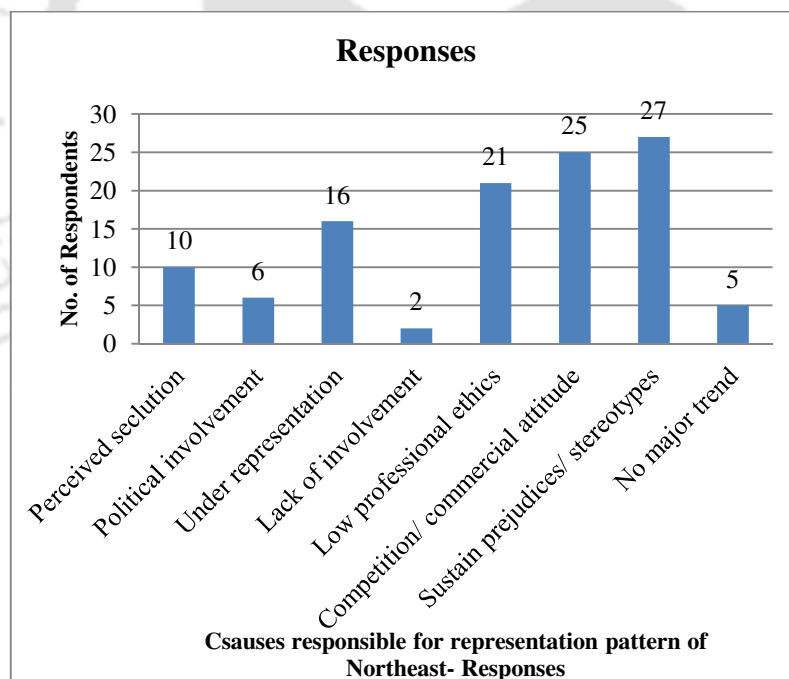


Figure 3.20: Responses on Causes Responsible for Representation Pattern of Northeast

**Perceived Seclusion:** 9% respondents (Figure 3.20) point at the region being secluded from the national consciousness and also mainstream media. Apparently the sense of isolation prevails mainly because of the distance from the mainland India, geographically as well as in the minds of people.

According to Sub-editor of a regional English language newspaper:

*Maybe because Northeast is not considered as part of India, it is contributing little to the nation's economy, so not many would be interested in the region as such.*

According to Producer (News) of regional television channel:

*The major reason of such representation is that this part of the country is secluded. There is problem in transportation. As communication technology helps to shrink the world, it is important to improve the same for proper portrayal of North East.*

According to Staff reporter of a regional vernacular language Newspaper organisation:

*The main causes for highlighting only terrorism, violence etc. in the mainstream media is the communication barrier between northeastern region and other parts of the country.*

**Political involvement:** 5% (Figure 3.20) respondents refer to involvement of political factors that lead to northeast either being marginalised in the mainland consciousness though ignored mainstream media attitude or selective representation in media. Even regional media houses do not seem to be of much help when it comes to breaking stereotypes, but rather they follow and supply mainstream media with desired reports on violence. Noteworthy was the mention of political involvement by respondents in very subtle manner and no one actually pronounced names or parties or even explained the prevalent scenario.

**Under-representation:** As the Editor of International news Magazine brands Northeast the “under-reported part of India”, 14% respondents (Figure 3.20) apparently refer to under-representation of the region in media has led to the region being neglected by mainstream media. As they perceive that media consumers beyond the state boundaries are not interested in the happening of the region it requires a drastic event to grab expected public attention. Thus the primary focus of media makers is to look for instances of violence from the region that are capable of reaching out convincingly to a wider target audience.

**Lack of involvement:** 2% respondents (Figure 3.20) believe it to be lack of involvement that has led to the patterned projection of the region in media. Respondents refer to lack of awareness and community participation as major causes for the region gaining limited media space and time. Respondents also refer to very

less media practitioners holding decision making positions in mainstream media houses. As a consequence of very less representation in national media houses as well, regional intricacies are often missed out by mainstream media houses. With generalised understanding and lack of proper research media reports from the region only happen to be reports of violence with only facts and figures.

**Low professional ethics:** 19% respondents (Figure 3.20) point at low professional ethics in journalistic practices in the region as causes responsible for such responses/patterns or variations in representation of violence.

According to News Producer of a television news channel broadcasted from Guwahati:

*Sometimes they even forget the professional ethics. An important aspect is that some of them do not even know what professional ethics is. There could also be the problem of media literacy among the media professionals themselves.*

According to CEO and Content Editor of a regional television channel:

*Most journalists consider themselves as social thinkers and intellectuals and in many cases acts like an expert giving out their comments, which has no iota of truth or is based on their findings, research or previous experiences. Most journalists feel that they can take their audience, readers for granted.*

**Competition/ commercial attitude:** 22% respondents (Figure 3.20) pointed at the competition in the industry as the basis of patterned projection of the region in media. As it is all about selling the media product like any other profit driven industry in market, media makers only concentrate on popular trends of media representations and avoid deviations which might jeopardize audiences and thus affect the commercial gains negatively. Pointing at the media houses, majority of the respondents apparently affirmed media competition and the main motive behind media production is to earn more profit' and thus according designing and selecting content.

According to Freelance journalist from Assam:

*Mushrooming media houses especially news channels and the increase in competition and TRP run.*

According to Senior Copy Editor of a regional English language newspaper:

*Mainstream Indian media (like the rest of world media) is driven by TRPs and readership numbers. So, it also provides stories the general masses will be interested in knowing or reading. In this manner, media goes on feeding people the stories that percolate their set mindset and attitude towards a place/ issue.*

According to Correspondent of a regional English language newspaper:

*The hunger for TRPs or circulation and the race for gathering the exclusive 'scoop' could be the causes responsible for such responses/ patterns or variations.*

Freelance journalist and also Editor of a current affairs magazine:

*Preoccupation with and hangover of 1970s-90s coupled with success of yellow journalism types has lead to the established situation. Every incident is seen in connection to the previous violence in comparison to number of victims and enormity of violence.*

**Sustain prejudices/ stereotypes:** 24% respondents (Figure 3.20) stated that keeping the existing prejudices and stereotypes regarding the region alive was the reason behind the patterned projection in media. Media apparently banks on the belief that consumers interest lies in violence from the region. Thus in making profits, respondents agreed confirmed that media practitioners tend to make homogeneous products from mass consumption which they believe would attract maximum viewer and reader attention and thus result in increasing TRPs and circulations respectively. Northeast as a whole has been reflected in media in a specific patter and mostly through violence. Thus the emerging patter of media representation of Assam and Northeast can be seen in correlation with the long history of violence in the region and also the history of media content representing the region.

According to Senior Copy Editor of an English Language newspaper:

*Mainstream media content selection and development is a profit oriented strategy. So, it also provides stories the general masses will be interested in knowing or reading. In this manner, media goes on feeding people the stories that percolate their set mindset and attitude towards a place/ issue.*

According to Assistant Producer (English News and Programming) of a regional television news channel:

*News is also about selling news and for this for a long time insurgency was and to some extent is still a major factor in the socio-political functioning of the region. This leads to national papers taking up these issues more and more.*

According to News coordinator of a regional television news channel:

*GS Road incident or BTAD violence only portrays the dark side while there are so many positives that can also be portrayed by the national media.*

According to Freelance journalist reporting for national newspapers and news portals:

*News is shown or reported depending upon what viewers/readers want to read or know. Hence, violence is increasingly reported from northeast India going by the judgment of media that violence from the region only interests people.*

According to Feature writer of a regional newspaper organisation:

*The events that occur have been convoluted or processed in the way that people can easily understand. Current affairs seem to attract maximum viewer attention.*

Perhaps summing up of most of the views of patterned projection of northeast in the media is the point made by Senior Producer of *Doordarshan*, Regional News Unit:

*Earlier only print media and cinema use to represent violence and related issues, after 1970 the “idiot box” came to existence through Aakashvani (All India radio) and DD was born too as the first television channel. After that revolution of visual media came drastically and mushrooming of media houses /channels began. These satellite channels can be from any corner of the world. And for the survival and existence they need regular income sources; which comes through sponsorship and commercials. These compel them to abide by responses of financiers, sponsors and target audience. Thus the social importance of the media houses got reduced to please sponsors or commercial decision makers, than to serve the interest of the people. Instead of authentic reliable responsible news media, there are dictative and bias media. The political parties have been taking advantages of these mushrooming commercially motivated media houses, which are reflected in media content. Commercial motive and political inclination has been the basic cause for these kinds of representations.*

### **3.3.8 Interpreting Northeast through Media Texts**

Media texts have the capacity to lead the audience into a particular topic in a given manner, from igniting curiosity to facilitate making assumptions (Boyle 49). Consequently in the particular case of northeast in media, mostly ignored has been the scrutiny of the meanings communicated by media representations of violence about the society and the cultural environment. Treating media texts interpretable, the northeastern region may be interpreted in a certain manner analysing the representations in media. According to respondents there has been selectively patterned projection of the region in media for long and the media attitude has been specifically trading issue like conflicts, extremism and explicit acts of violence.

Media texts in general about the region irrespective of its spread, reach, language and channel apparently does further the strong stereotypes that have been prevalent in minds of people. A majority of 101 respondents believe that media texts about northeast have been furthering the negative image of Assam and rest of the northeastern states through stereotypical representation of violence instances only. On the contrary, only seven out of 112 respondents believe, that interpretative media texts have been changing of late for the good, breaking the existing traditional practice of stereotypical projection.

The responses (Figure 3.21) on Interpreting northeast through media texts may be categorised as below:

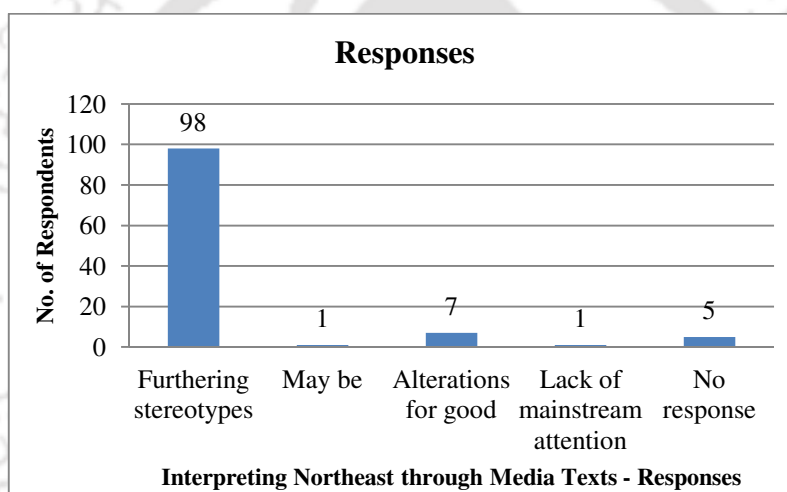


Figure 3.21: Responses on Interpreting Northeast through Media Texts

**Furthering stereotypes:** 88% respondents (Figure 3.21) opine that media texts regarding Northeast apparently stereotype northeast branding the region with backwardness, violence, underdevelopment, unrestfulness, terrorism prone, and similar negative attributes.

According to Senior Copy Editor of a regional English language newspaper:

*Media reinforces the notions of terrorism, backwardness, physical distance of exotic northeast by words used in the story and also the angles given to stories related to this region.*

According to News Producer of a regional television news channel:

*Media text are always very sensitive especially when it is related to a particular group, community etc. In the eyes and ears of the other parts of the country, northeast is a militant infected region filled with corruption and jungles. If the media always stresses on this points*

*rather than looking at the positive aspects and work on how to develop the region, then northeast will always be connected to militants, jungles, corruption etc.*

**According to Producer (News and Programme) of a regional television channel:**

*The word associated with North East is ULFA, NDFB, Bomb Blasts etc. Repeated usage of such words relates this part as a violent area.*

**According to CEO & Content Editor of a regional television news channel:**

*You always come across terms like geographically difficult to commute; land-locked Northeast, insurgency hit Northeast, alienated from mainstream etc. These are some words, which has become synonyms with Northeast. As a journalist of this region, I find it stereotype. As if journalists can use flowery words to brand the entire region, which comprises of eight states.*

**According to Sub-editor of an English language Newspaper organisation:**

*The consistent usage of terms like violence hit, terrorism, hardcore criminals, violence torn, conflict ridden, etc can be evaluated as the media being already judgmental and following the existent age long belief of northeast being completely disorderly.*

**According to Sub-editor of a vernacular language newspaper organisation:**

*Northeast is interpreted in very poor light by the rest of the India. By personal experience, I can say that most people view Northeast to a land of terrorists, every hold possessing gun and ready to fight. It is viewed as underdeveloped region with uneducated and unrest people.*

**According to Reporter/copy writer of a vernacular language newspaper:**

*All the northeastern states are viewed as faraway land where people from the mainland are afraid to enter.*

**According to Freelance journalist of Assam:**

*Northeast is a volatile region, hub of conflicts- this is the mainstream India's interpretation.*

**According to Producer News, Doordarshan News Regional News Unit:**

*We should consider the interest of nation's traditions, culture and the value of humans' basic needs. But national media has been projecting Northeast in inappropriate manner, where the real picture has been hiding somewhere and the negative is more prerogative. Northeast is provided with less of media space and time and moreover has also been denied due attention because of less commercial value. Any viewer who is watching Northeast through media will have all negative perceptions. Even though we are lighted enough by the grace of god, still we are in confinement. And this confinement is mainly caused by less representation by media persons and intellectuals who are supposed to lend their voices properly for the cause of the people. Charity begins at home, but our intellectual heads think in overreaching part of India. They should focus first on the northeastern region, first home then rest of the world.*

**Alterations for good:** 6% respondents (Figure 3.21) refer the way the representation patterns of violence in the region have changed over time is evident through modified media perceptions and interventions into other than violence aspects. Apparently interpreting media texts, the Northeast may be portrayed in positive light in a much better way by following ethical and moral steps and practicing developmental journalism. Violence seems to be the dominant media content which is gradually being taken over but cultural and tourism aspects and propagations.

According to Sub-editor of a regional newspaper organization:

*Northeast is nowadays portrayed as a vault of resources, scenic beauty, musical talents and shunning the age-old images of Northeast as a terrorist-ridden region.*

According to Desk editor of a regional television news channel:

*Northeast can be highlighted through its diversity in nature, resources, rich culture, and new developments in various fields. Being more positive and showing positive things is the new trend in media.*

**Lack of mainstream attention:** 1% of respondent (Figure 3.21) refer to the lack of attention provided to the northeastern state as a whole by the mainstream media which makes interpretations insignificant.

According to Desk Editor of the English language newspaper organisation:

*No text can be interpreted by itself, without social, economic, political and cultural studies of the same alongside with it. Northeast has a long way to go before it will be even considered for interpretation at a popular level in the nation.*

As derived from the respondents, media representation with reference to reporting of violence in Assam and also instances from entire Northeast was found affirmative in collectively promoting the predominant perceptions of a wider range of media consumers about the region. As derived from literature survey and responses that regional as well and national media has been focusing on extensive and selective reporting of instances of violence only from the region. Also as revealed in a study, conducted on trends of conflict reporting in the Northeast “the dominant media structure does not think beyond the existing frameworks for viewing the situation” (Bordoloi). With a majority of 88% respondents strongly believe that media texts only have furthered the stereotypical perception about Assam and entire Northeast. As widely understood the media represents only ‘disquieting stories of unrest, insurgency

and violence’ (Basu and Kohli 183) and rarely deals with the ‘institutional development processes’ (183) of the northeastern states. Like “in the case of Manipur, many of the media agencies did not focus on the importance of past history and the indigenous demographic profile of the state” but instead only intervened when the violence that was in accordance with popular perceptions, was expected to attract media consumers. Thus it may be confirmed that the “narrow media outlook is responsible for a substantial misunderstanding of political processes in the northeast” (Bordoloi).

Media texts, specifically news are broadly “socially constructed reality” (Berkowitz 16/453) which “necessarily has meaning and significance” (118). Interpretation of media texts also depends on the how messages or ideologies are transmitted to the public. Thus the way violence in regard to the region is shown in media texts has the power to define what northeast actually is and what it becomes in perception of the media consumers. As widely understood “news is not the reality, but an interpretation of the event that depends on who sees it, writes it and often also who reads it (Mochahari); the media perceptions surrounding Assam and the entire Northeast needs to be relooked into in order to project a better region to the rest of the world and change perceptions and break stereotypes.

### **3.3.9 Negative Representation of Violence: Few Instances**

As one of the respondents pointed out “*most media professionals love to sensationalise any story on violence*”, instances of sensationalised negative reporting of violence in Assam are exceedingly more than any other facet of reporting. Thus assuming most media representations of violence in the region project negativity, few instances were cited by the media makers upon enquiry, where they themselves believed that the way the things took shape in media were inappropriate and were quoted as negative representation of the particular event or incident. While only 3% of respondents believed that representation of violence in media is done appropriately by regional as well as mainstream media, another section of one percent believed that things have started to change for the better.

The responses (Figure 3.22) on Few Instances of Negative Representation of Violence may be categorised as below:

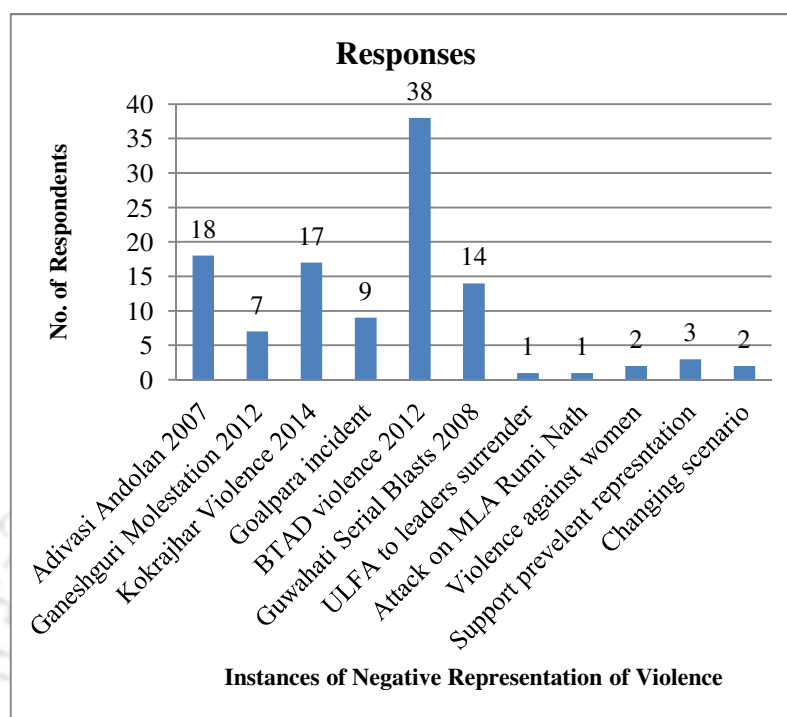


Figure 3.22: Responses on Few Instances of Negative Representation of Violence

**Adivasi Andolan 2007:** 16% respondents (Figure 3.22) referred to the Adivasi Andolan also known as the 2007 Beltola Incident, when violence erupted during a rally taken out by tribal people demanding Scheduled Tribe status for their community. As a Tehelka report stated “The violent clashes between the local people and the Adivasi rallyists left one dead and about 240 injured, one lady was reportedly gangraped and around 31 people were reported missing, some of them women” (Rehman 2014). The primary attention of the media as revealed by respondents and archive reports was the woman protester who was stripped and molested by the residents of Guwahati with extended focus on violence (see Image 25, 26, 27).

As a Senior News Correspondent of an English language newspaper organisation sums up media’s negative approach towards the incident:

*Beltola incident was seen projecting the other side of human behaviour, where only one aspect of the protest was highlighted. The cause and effect of the protest was never picked up by media. Only one woman was attacked by some miscreants, but some media houses even projected it as many being stripped and harassed. Moreover the identity of the female victim was openly disclosed in news reports which stand against media ethics.*

**Ganeshguri Molestation 2012:** 6% respondents (Figure 3.29) referred to the incidence in Ganeshguri in Guwahati which apparently exposes the insensitivity of reporters to deal with violence against a woman. “The incident created a nation-wide sensation when a girl was molested by a group of people outside a bar on July 9, 2012 and the entire incident was shot by a media person on camera which was later telecasted” (11 convicted, four acquitted in Guwahati molestation case).

According to Anchor/ Programme Producer of a regional television news channel:

*The most recent example is that of the molestation case near Club mint (**Violence against women**), GS Road. The journalist shot the incident waited for the entire drama to roll out so that he could record the entire incident. The result was that he got very strong images for his story but he failed as a human being. His main action should have been stopping the men from molesting the girl and call for help which the reporter did not do.*

**Kokrajhar violence 2014:** 15% respondents (Figure 3.22) refer at the 2014 violence in Assam. The initiation of the violence was a series of attacks by an extremist group in the districts of Chirang, Sonitpur and Kokrajhar of Assam on 23 December 2014. It was attack on non-Bodo settlers of the region by the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB). As per news reports “the militants killed 37 people in Sonitpur, and 27 in Kokrajhar, including 18 children and 21 women” (Karmakar). As a Hindustan Times headline describes the incident in short “Assam killings take on ethnic hue: Over 70 killed in Bodo attacks, 250 missing” (Karmakar) the emphasis in the story lies in the highlight of the ethnic conflict. “At least 250 people are reported missing in one of the bloodiest incidents of ethnic violence in the northeastern state, bringing back memories of 2012 when similar conflicts between Bodo tribal groups and Bengali-Muslims in Kokrajhar and neighbouring districts left about 100 people dead and over five lakh homeless” (Karmakar).

**BTAD violence 2012:** 34% of respondents (Figure 3.22) referred to the violence in BTAD (Bodoland Territorial Autonomous District) in Assam in 2012, clashes between the so called ‘Bodos’ and the Muslims. As Subir Bhaumik describes the magnitude of the extended violence, “The latest bout has left about 40 dead and displaced tens of thousands. The state remains tense as the army has been issued with shoot on sight orders” (2012). Below are some selected responses which cite the negative aspect of representation of violence in the 2012 Assam violence.

*Coverage of communal clashes in Assam's BTAD area can be completely said to be biased reporting by certain news channels.*

*Say for example the recent BTAD violence. The more coverage the media gave to the issue, the more aggravated the situation became. BTAD continued to burn for months.*

*To cite instances and examples there will be many but to sum up with the recent fallout in Assam's BTAD (2012), it is clear that most media houses were running to give news first and fast, showing old visuals as something that just happened.*

*The recent coverage of ethnic clashes that occurred last year in Bodoland Territorial Autonomous District (BTAD) proves that without much research conducted on the origin and deep rooted aspects of the conflict, judgment was very easily passed on the nature of the conflict, instead of breaking down the complexity of the issue. Also most news channels had similar kind of coverage and similar views on the issues with very little room for introspection and very little representation from the actual people who are part of the area of conflict.*

*Ethnic Violence of 2012 in BTAD was represented in media in very negative manner. No media reported story on positive actions done by government or the civil society group or common man. What was out in media, only added fuel to the negative communal sentiments of people.*

As is found in various representations of violence the religious identities of the people are given more priority rather than focusing on the real story. As pointed out by few below are few selected responses sharing similar views:

*Violence in BTAD is projected over and over again by local media which spur into a major quarrels between the people living outside Assam, such as Karnataka, Maharashtra and some other places... the people of Assam who are working there had rushed back home for safety and security, only on the basis of rumours and widely publicised sms's send anti-Indian propaganda terrorist or may be some other underground group. But it could have been checked if the right to freedom of speech is used properly. Unnecessarily communal tensions began in some parts of Assam which could have been controlled if the local media is to have the mind to check and balances.*

*The Bangladeshi-Bodo clash that happened in 2012 was blown over the media as a communal strife (Muslims verses Bodos) and not as a national issue (Bangladeshis VS Bodos). This is a negative representation of violence as the root of the problem is completely taken out of the picture (usurping Bodo territory and land) and what is presented to the audience ignites communal sentiments which lead to unnecessary communal violence within India."*

**Guwahati serial blasts 2008:** Assam blasts on 30<sup>th</sup> October, 2008 in Guwahati are considered as the worst ever serial blasts in Assam. 13% respondents (Figure 3.22) referred to the 2008 blasts and related representation by media to have been done unethically following no said rules of violence representation. While the television news channels are criticised of broadcasting horrific details and unedited footages over and over again (see Image 7, 8, 9) the print media also is said to have published images of the violence unedited (see Image 1). As a *Reuters* report states “Eleven bomb blasts in quick succession ripped through the main city of India's troubled northeastern Assam state and three other towns... killing at least 68 people and wounding 335” (Das).

Selective responses reflecting the above view are given below:

*Graphic coverage of the serial bomb blasts that rocked Guwahati by the local media and negligence by national media left much to be desired.*

*Serial blasts on 30<sup>th</sup> October, 2008 in parts of Assam. The coverages were mainly on how many people died and how many were injured. The mostly focus of private news channels was on government inefficiency in tackling the situation and lack of security initiatives taken in the state irrespective of past experiences.*

**Goalpara incident:** Nine respondents point at the violence in Goalpara district in Assam along Assam-Meghalaya border as apparently been negatively represented by media. A *Tehelka* report dated 22 January 2011 reported “at least 10 deaths, nearly 100 injured, 50,000 displaced and more than 300 houses gutted” (Choudhury). Media reports were primarily on violent ethnic clashes between two communities, the Garos and the Rabhas and disruption of communal harmony in the region. Moreover the extensive reports of the displaced people were repeatedly broadcasted by television news channels with explicit coverage of the relief camps. Visuals from direct location were broadcast on mainstream news channels as well like *Times Now* (see Image 23) and *NDTV* (see Image 19, 21) along with photographs published in mainstream newspapers and news portals like *The Indian Express* (see Image 24).

According to Senior Correspondent of a vernacular language newspaper organisation:

*Media reports exemplified the tension between the communities in such a way that violence escalated instantly. Media reports were too quick to pronounce the initiation of violence. I don't know if all reported by media were actually true or not. But the worse coverage was of the displaced in camps.*

**Support prevalent representation:** 3% respondents (Figure 3.22) denied any negativism in media representation of violence in the region. Respondents apparently explained media representations to be representations of the happenings around. And as the situation is volatile representations also would not be pleasing. Some even blames the media consumers of misinterpreting the media texts as negative.

According to Senior Correspondent of a National newspaper with Guwahati edition:

*No one should blame media for representing violence in a news item. However in many cases there are examples of audience taking a news item in a different way and reacting to it. The recent communal conflicts in the state are fresh examples, where several sections of people reacted to some news items.*

According to Staff Reporter of a vernacular language newspaper:

*There is no negative response to representation of violence in media. We only report on facts and figures and on the action taken by the police or the state government in such situations.*

**Changing scenario:** 2% of respondents (Figure 3.22) pointed at the recent changes that have been noticed in media representations regarding Northeast. The focus apparently has shifted from violence to stories with encouraging positive story angles. From a violent prone image the region is procuring identity and gaining popularity with its efficiency in the field of sports, culture and tourism.

Exclusively pointing out with changing instances of representation patters from Assam in media was apparently not easy for respondents. Covering the entire northeastern region certain instances were pointed out by respondents so as to mark the shift in representations. As a respondent stated:

*Changes may be noticed in media attention to various other issues rather than terror alone. The focus has been on sports to some extent especially on Manipur after Olympics. The Northeast football association also had its share of media attention.*

According to Freelance journalist from Assam:

*Manipur is represented mostly for violence by militants or state, although its sports, culture, arts have more news value. A film on life of Mary Kom can be said to the best example.*

**Surrender of top leaders of ULFA:** 1% of respondents referred to the surrendered ULFA members and procedure related news left lot to be desired for the media to perform in the region. Moreover the “label ‘Sulfa’ coined by the local media... took on a pejorative connotation” (Mahanta 145). Respondents were opined that the

mainstream media is mostly seen accepting news only in relation to violence when it comes to ULFA or any other organisation as such and thus peace processes and Surrender of militants does not interest or figure in media reports. Regional media though seems to cover the incidents proper explanation of events, background stories and reconciliations and follow-up stories are often missed out.

Respondents referring to negative representation of violence also mentioned about **Attack on MLA Rumi Nath** (1% of respondents) and **Gender violence or reports on Rape Victims** (1% of respondents) as incidents which were not appropriately reported in media. In case of attack on Member of Legislative Assembly respondents feel media played a biased role in protecting the women negatively and also to some extent reportedly supported the mob attack on her. Moreover if considered the incident to be a violence against women incident the identity of the victim needed to be guarded rather than directly showing the incident unedited, or doing direct photo stories. While for gender violence representation respondents criticised media reports of revealing the identities of the victim without consent.

It was derived that respondents refer to a plethora of examples of instances of representation of violent incidents, mostly referring to the negative manner. Most of the incidents cited were of mass violence, where perpetrators of violence were many, and also a large population was affected. The elaborate reportage of violence by television news channels was reported by a newspaper as "...television today brought to Assam homes one more scene of Saturday's street horror - when hundreds of tribals were attacked over a 3.5km stretch of the city" ("Shame on Guwahati streets").

### **3.3.10 Perception Creation through Media Representations**

Media is considered instrumental in constructing perception of the society through its representations. Moreover media representations may be primarily held responsible for the perceptions people outside the region usually have about the region. News as the 'purveyor of truth' (Boyle 61) with its easy accessibility and acceptance makes it inevitable for media consumers to believe, strengthen assumptions and create perceptions. Similarly news production practices based on decisive news values "play an important role in helping to structure public opinion" either by only selection of a

certain type of news based on these criteria and exclusion of others or by highlighting specific news elements within a story itself (Price and Tewksbury 177). This results in media consumers receiving only selective segmented representation of the society and consequently are “primed to interpret their social worlds in ways that reflect that set” as portrayed in news (177) which “combine to shape the social psyche and attitude” of the consumers at large (Sudhir and Jubita 125).

Every working media practitioner seems to be of the perception that the common masses as media consumers do not want to believe in anything looking beyond their common beliefs. As the popular understanding of the entire Northeastern region is that of a region economically backward and terror prone; and the most common perception about Assam in particular is that the state is a zone of insurgency and ethnic conflicts; the media makers too make all efforts to stick to the already media created perceptions revolving around violence and conflict; and thus attempt at not deviating from the patterned projection of the region.

The responses (Figure 3.23) on Perception creation about Northeast through Media representations may be categorised as below:

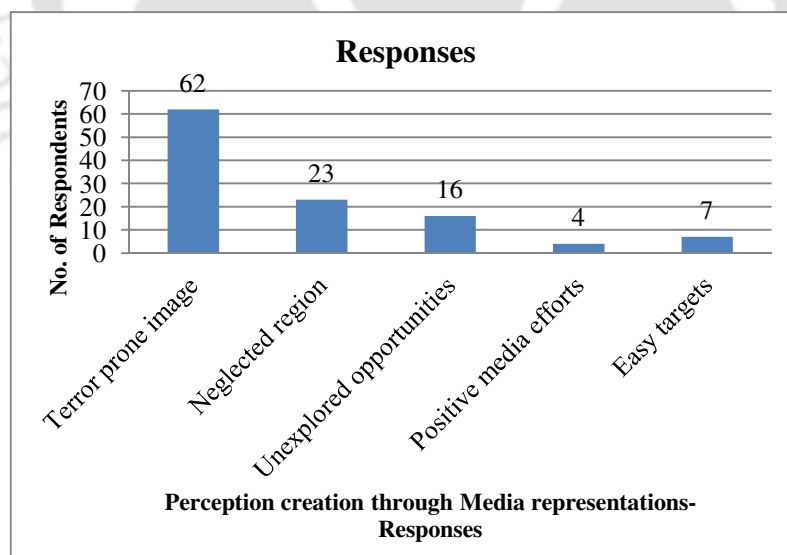


Figure 3.23: Responses on Northeast Perception through Media Representations

**Terror prone image:** 55% respondents (Figure 3.23) opine that people outside the region view Northeast as a whole as a terror prone region, mostly terrorist driven states. Apparently media is responsible for the negative terror prone image as it has been projecting northeast only through violent incidents. Creating and strengthening

perceptions regarding northeast being under a reign of insurgency, unsafe for living, isolated from rest of the nation, non-communicable, volatile nature, exotic people, etc.; is all media has done through its pattered and exaggerated media representations. Some specific responses are presented below reflecting the view:

According to Copy editor of an English language newspaper published from Assam:

*The basic perception of people living outside Northeast about this region is that it is terror infested and unsafe for living with no possibility for development. Northeast is very much neglected by the mainstream media and media is very much responsible as very little is known about this region. It is high time that the mainstream and the regional media do something about this region and bring to the fore the problems that are being faced by the people of this region. The regional media can play a very pivotal role to do the needful at this hour.*

According to Freelance journalist and Editor of a current affairs magazine:

*To a certain extent, media reinforces the notions of terrorism, backwardness, physical distance of exotic northeast through the use of its words used in the story and also the angles given to stories related to this region.*

According to Producer (English News) of a regional television channel:

*North East is being viewed as hub of militancy by other parts of the country. With media flooding with the news of bomb blasts, seizure of arms, arrest of militants, communal violence etc. this part is considered as epicentre of violence by entire country.*

According to Desk Editor of a regional television channel:

*National media has a lot to do in influencing the audience's perspective on a region which they know little about. The number of terror outfits in the region also led to the perception that Northeast as a tourist hub is a very dangerous territory.*

According to Senior Producer (News) of a television news channel:

*Usually the common notion people from elsewhere have about Northeast is that of a violence-stricken place and barbarian people yet to be civilised. Media is to an extent responsible for news of bomb blasts and gunshots or AFSPA (Armed Forces Special Powers Acts) making headlines, if not then we are reduced to some exotic people still steeped in ancient way of life.*

According to Copy editor of a newspaper organisation in Guwahati:

*The northeast is often perceived as violence infested area with practically little to do with the outside world. The media presents a singular point of view and often fails to deliver the stories of different people and different ideas which are very much present in the region.*

According to Reporter, regional television channel broadcasted from Guwahati:

*Most of the people think Northeast is highly terrorist effected region and remote area. For such thinking media is highly responsible as most it always focus on the terrorist and violence issues rather on other developing issues.*

According to Correspondent of a vernacular language newspaper of Assam:

*From my personal experience, people are really scared to come to the NE regions. In their eyes every other person might be a terrorist/ ULFA. Media has given no other choice to people actually, they do not know of anything else existing in the region.*

Reflecting similar views and holding the media majorly responsible for the terror prone image of the region, a Freelance journalist opines:

*This region has all the negative things on earth- militancy, ethnic conflicts, corruption, chauvinism and what not. The weaknesses are strong. Strengths are weak. This perception is manufactured by selective reporting, TRP driven gatekeeping and presumed understanding of reality. Media is thus the main responsible agency.*

According to Producer (News) of DD News working from DD Northeast, Guwahati:

*People think it's a jungle. Not connected with rest of the nation; beyond communication network, with all sorts of difficulties that make it uninhabitable. But it is not true. It is a part of India and whatever is available in other parts of the country the very same is possible in Northeast too. Only thing is it is not properly represented. The beauty the nature, natural resources, the serenity and the virginity of the land is overlooked and misrepresented. Moreover because of partial information that percolates outside people's knowledge is also distorted. The media is to be completely blamed for the present situation, for not projecting the facts about the region properly and rather projecting political events only such as militancy problem, separate state problem, and ethnic clashes.*

**Neglected region:** 21% respondents (Figure 3.23) consider media apparently responsible for the northeast being a neglected region, a region little known by the people outside the regional boundaries. Since the mainstream media has been providing very limited slot to news from the region and even limited diversity in content in the limited space and time allotted, audiences are being exposed to only a particular kind of constructed reality, partially true more often through the mediated messages. Thus media representations resulting in restricted knowledge, limited understanding and false perceptions.

According to Assistant Editor of a regional television news channel:

*Most people have certain wrong conception about northeast. If we name any state of the northeast some of them do not even know that it is actually part of India. Some understands*

*northeast to be filled with militants, corruption, violence, jungles etc. Media has never served its purpose of informing and educating people when it comes to the Northeast of India. Media has played a critical role in communicating such kind of specific messages to the outside world.*

According to Freelance journalist:

*Many people outside Northeast have very less information about Northeast and its people. To begin with they do not even know the names of all the states in north east. I can state from personal experience that they think that Northeast is a part of west Bengal, some think it's a part of China. The mainstream media has ignored the region. The media disinterest is transferred to the audiences as well.*

**Unexplored opportunities:** Few respondents reflected their faith and belief in media, as for them media is the only platform that has potential and prospect to change and break the persistent projection stereotypes of the region. 14% respondents (Figure 3.23) refer to various unexplored opportunities by media which could be instrumental in voicing issues that have been so far overlooked in media representations. Respondents believe that the media both in national as well as regional level, with proper reporting and representation, might play a significant role in influencing and transforming the audiences' perspective about the region which they otherwise know little about.

According to Senior Copy Editor of English language newspaper published from Assam:

*It is high time that the mainstream media and the regional media do something about this region and bring to the fore the problems that are being faced by the people of this region. The regional media can play a very pivotal role to do the needful at this hour.*

According to Producer/ Programme Editor of a regional television news channel:

*Many see northeast as terror-struck, economically backward region. Media could do a lot to wipe the prejudice that northeast is backward. Mizoram is second most literate state, but many don't know that. So highlighting facts and figures, campaigns will surely change perceptions towards it.*

According to Content-editor of a regional television news channel:

*Perception is a notion, which has been created mostly by different forms of media, literature etc. I think that this notion can be easily changed, provided we are willing to do so. Let's us be prepared to showcase Northeast and its essence to the world as media houses in Northeast, we should stop the debate of stereotyping Northeast by blaming each other.*

According to Assistant Producer (News) of a regional television channel:

*Usually the common notion that people from other than the Northeast region have of the region is that it is a violence-stricken place and the people barbarians or yet to be civilized. Media is to an extent responsible that news of bomb blasts and gunshots or AFSPA make headlines if not then we are reduced to some exotic people still steeped in ancient way of life.*

According to Freelance journalist based in Assam:

*It is true that there are hundreds of insurgent groups in northeast. But their viewpoints need to be published as well. For this perception, many people don't come to states like Assam, Nagaland even though these states have huge potential in tourism. Tourists usually go to Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh rather than Assam or Nagaland or Manipur.*

According to Additional Deputy Director (News), of Doordarshan News (Guwahati)

*Instead of violence and politics media should project even northeast through traditions, cultures etc. so that people actually get to know what the region is actually like. Media should focus on other aspects of the region like tourism. Moreover effective media portrayal may clear misconceptions such as people here are not wild. For example men have been projected as head-hunters, the exotic tribes only from the region. Though it may be treated as a good subject for documentaries (extensive work has been done already) but it should be made clear that it does not represent the entire community.*

**Positive media efforts:** 4% respondents out of 112 interviewed (Figure 3.23) pointed at the change in public perceptions gradually due to media efforts only. Apparently media is responsible for highlighting various aspects of the region and attempts being made by the media practitioners at promoting the region in different facets not known to audiences beyond regional boundaries. Thus changing negative perceptions of the people outside the region to venture in and invest.

According to National newspaper organisation's Assam correspondent:

*Earlier the mainland India knew this part of the country as a hotbed of militants but due to constant effort by media and social organisations, northeast now has been emerging as a new home for tourism, industry and power.*

According to News Coordinator of a regional television news channel:

*There was a time when people had no knowledge of the region whatsoever. But now the situation is changing. With regional media houses going global, people can access news content from all over the world. More over the representation of the region by the national channels too have changed following the regional TV boom in Assam.*

**Easy targets:** 6% respondents (Figure 3.23) felt it was the media representation pattern that has been projecting the northeastern population as easy targets. Apart

from Northeast increasingly being perceived as a violence-ridden region, certain strong stereotypes even work against the people of the region. For example one of the most negative and harmful but strong perception that persists among people outside the region is that the girls from Northeast are 'loose' and 'easy'.

According to Sub-editor of a regional English language newspaper organization:

*Firstly, many people don't even know the names of the Northeastern States. They bracket all the States under a common tag "The Northeast". And to them Northeast symbolizes militancy, unrest, jungles, dog eaters, scantily dressed women, easily available girls whom they term as "chinkies" and of course a region that hardly contributes to the nation's economy. Media has been highly responsible for such perception of the "other India". May be had the content (atleast some part of it), been about the developments, about the multiplicity of cultures that exist in the region, about the nature's bounty and the simplicity of its people. About development and its strategic importance or at least had the northeast formed a part of the national news every day, maybe then the perceptions of the people would have changed.*

Though there is a lesser amount of substantial work done in the area to validate that the perception creation about Northeastern population may be directly or indirectly related to media representations, but certainly media reports have never tried to correct the perceptions or break stereotypes as well. Strong stereotypes that exist in the mind of people may be broadly attributed to media representations. Northeast Indians in general are "stereotyped as loose and immoral" (McDuie-Ra 96) and the region is widely accepted as "politically and culturally insignificant" (94). Thus media mentions of the "backward and exotic" people only while reporting on violence and terrorism as "violent anti-national separatist bent on destroying India" (93/94) that fits the national context. The responses were in confirmation to the derivation from literature available, media representations have been propagating a terror prone image of the state, while many also believe the region to be marginalised in the mainstream media consciousness.

### **3.3.11 Reporting Violence: Cultural or Ethical Concerns**

Examining the concerns in reporting violence becomes significant as it is evident that these representations of violence lead the media consumers to perception creation and also facilitate strong public opinions. While media representations primarily depend upon the understandings of its makers, thus cultural and ethical issues surrounding media practices basically revolve around what the media practitioners deem as

ethically correct and culturally viable while reporting on instances of violence. Experts like Klite, Lynch, McGoldrick and Schechter have pointed out that the reason why the media consumers are unable to comprehend the complexities of violence and related situations, places and people because ‘most journalists operate without a well-developed ethical framework for covering violence’ (Carter and Weaver 22).

The responses (Figure 3.24) on cultural or ethical concerns of reporting and releasing violence in media may be categorised as below:

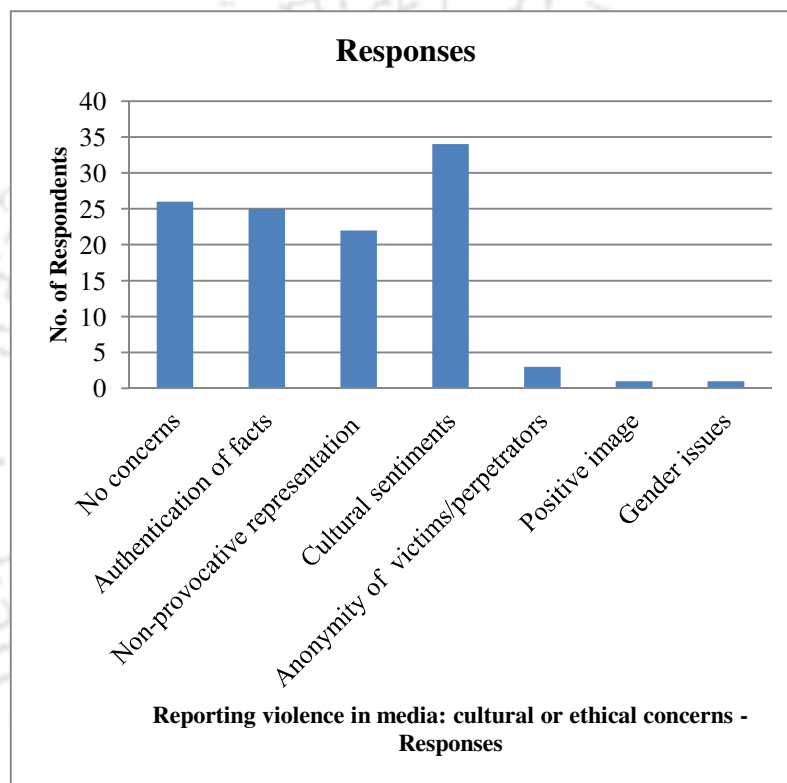


Figure 3.24: Responses on Cultural or Ethical Concerns of Reporting Violence in Media

**No concerns:** 23% of respondents (Figure 3.24) blatantly refuted of having any preconceived cultural and ethical concerns per se regarding media content. There were no elaborate comments given on the subject, but it was found that when it comes to news on violence the primary intention of the media makers is to expose at the earliest so as to gain maximum benefit of the information in the media market.

**Authentication of facts:** 22% respondents (Figure 3.24) referred to authentication and validation of facts to be one of the major concerns of any media practitioner before publicising any piece of information for its consumers.

According to Editor of a vernacular language newspaper from Assam:

*Ethical concern is that the report should be non-biased and should have news values without any presumed judgment or personal feelings. Mostly journalists from the region practicing here develop support biases regarding subjects which often get reflected in their journalistic works. This should be strictly avoided for objectively reporting events for a greater audience.*

According to city correspondent of a regional newspaper and also a media faculty:

*The cultural or ethical concerns that I may have before releasing a media product is that it finds suitable representation of all the issues and does not simply deliver an opinionated picture while remaining true to its distinct element.*

According to Reporter of a regional television news channel:

*As a journalist I should know the probable effect of my story, my story should always needs to be unbiased based upon proper facts and figures. Exaggeration should be terminated and facts should be double checked.*

As per Sub-editor of an English language newspaper published from Guwahati:

*First concern is to ensure validity of the news facts and whether in its representation it has been over sensationalised, especially in case of violence. Secondly, will it debase a particular culture or community values and ignite violence? And lastly, whether it leaves any scope of defamation that we as a media house could be charged with.*

**Non- provocative representation:** 20% respondents (Figure 3.24) opine that the primary concern of releasing a media product to its consumers should be ensuring that the representation is non-provocative in nature. Representation in media should not be encouraging or aggravating violence. Major concern of media apparently may be non-sensationalised representation where media should refrain from hurting sentiments of the people with their respective belief systems. Media messages rather than extensively covering violence from the region should work on peace towards social, religious, communal and ethnic harmony, through mediated media communication, propose respondents.

According to Senior Copy Editor of an English language newspaper:

*While reporting on the BTAD violence last year, some media houses used certain words and showed certain pictures which were responsible for flaring up the violence. These should be avoided at all costs.*

According Regional correspondent of a National television news channel:

*My concerns are not cultural before releasing a media product, but more ethical. I hence make a special note that my media product is not provocative; it does not hurt the sentiment of any person and does not challenge the ethical value of communication.*

A significant insight into the religious complexities of the Northeast which needs to be understood and accordingly represented was given by Producer News of Regional News unit of *Doordarshan News*:

*Many in Northeast belong to Scheduled Tribes (STs) community, and they still carry primitive ideas and ideologies along with their modern identities. And basic principle is they love nature, humanity. They believe in ultimate sacrifice for the community. After Christianisation they became more aware of religious faith, along with their ethnic identities. So their mixed sentiments should not be hurt. And with the mainland India and its diverse culture, ethnicity and Christianity is a complex concept. To project these communities is the challenge for media.*

**Cultural sentiments:** 30% respondents (Figure 3.24) opine that representation in media should be such that it does not hurt sentiments of any particular group or individuals. The practice of media practitioners abstaining from generalised stereotypical representations and mis-representations especially regarding instances of violence that affect a larger group of people in most cases of collective violence needs to be persuaded. Certain representations need to look beyond the facts of the incident in figures and explore ground realities so as to not hurt sentiments of local indigenous people and national integration.

According to Freelance Correspondent (Northeast):

*Culture is important for every community. We journalists cannot hurt the sentiments of the people in the name of culture. Moreover, this is a region filled with different community, having different religious values.*

According to Desk Editor of English language newspaper from Assam:

*It should not be ensured that the released media content in no way can be perceived as persecuting/demeaning any culture. Media messages should not exaggerate any cultural stereotypes.*

According to Assistant Producer (English news) of television news channel:

*The only concern before releasing news to the viewers is to make sure that the news should not hurt any ethnic race or defame any cultural ethos. We tend not to hurt anybody's sentiments, especially religious sentiments.*

According to Freelance journalist contributing for various media houses regionally:

*Media products are meant for mass consumption with heterogeneous and anonymous audiences, and therefore concern for cultural sensibilities and ethical considerations are must. At the same time, we consciously and cautiously avoid taboos and false morality.*

Consolidating the cultural and ethical concerns of any media product, CEO & Content Editor of a television news channel broadcasted from Assam, identifies three major concerns that media houses apparently take care of:

- *Firstly, we see that the message to go on air does not hurt any religious believes, cultures or traditions.*
- *Secondly, we see that it does not portray women as a symbol of sex to sell a commodity or a product.*
- *Thirdly, we see that it does not affect the ethos of this region and its people or can affect children in anyways.*

**Anonymity of victims/ perpetrators** of violence: 3% respondents opined that in representation of any violence and conflict it is essential to maintain anonymity regarding the identity of the perpetrators or the victims. These generalised identities constructed by media are often seen to be the cause for escalation of violence in most cases.

According to Bureau Chief of an international news agency:

*It is essential that the news report does not incite further violence. For example the religion of a person who dies in violence should be declared only after considering the repercussions it may have.*

According to Freelance correspondent of Assam, contributing to national television news channels:

*It should be confirmed that the news doesn't incite further violence. For example the identity of victims of violence should usually be kept anonymous. Name, religion, cast, location etc might let to identification which might be instigating further violence or counter violence.*

**Positive message:** 1% of respondents refer to the primary concern of media in all its representations should be to spread a positive message among its consumers. Role should be of media was perceived to be judgemental information sharing so as so spread positive image about the region to the media consumers and not merely emphasis on violence.

According to Copy Editor of a regional vernacular language newspaper organization:

*Media concern should be to give a positive message.....Unity in diversity, tolerance, peace, cooperation and brotherhood. There are aspects of violence which needs to be projected rather than just on mere numbers of people killed and displaced.*

**Gender issues : 1% of respondents** (Figure 3.24) refer to gender issues, especially in reporting women issues in relation to violence, may it be collective violence or individual instances of atrocities, the media representation in no way should portray women as a symbol of sex to sell a commodity or a product. Apparently in revealing the desired media attitude respondents were seen referring to past situations where the portrayal of women were not as desired by them. Moreover respondents referred to situations where the victim of violence and gender revelations were exploited by media to “cheap publicity”

According to Additional Deputy Director (News) of *Doordarshan* Regional News Unit:

*During the coverage of Ganeshguri molestation case, the Assam government media cell had given out the female victim's name. Such mistakes should be never repeated, never in the case of any kind of violence again women.*

It is derived from the responses that most of the media practitioners actually are specifically not much concerned about cultural or ethical concerns on reporting violence. While a number of respondents did talk of some cultural concerns, but mostly hinted at media ethics being followed in representations. Very few actually mentioned of any cultural concerns as such. Even as ethical practices were pointed essential to be followed by media, most were found to be more of directives rather than actual practices being pronounced. It is evident that no ethical or cultural concerns are considered in media productions while reporting violence from the region. This signifies and also confirms that the prime focus of the production is the expected acceptance by the target audiences, and the concept of ethics was flexible enough to accommodate adjustments as and when required. This more or less reflects the attitude of “generalized benevolence” (Graham 2004: 134) as identified by Gordon Graham which considers promoting generalised happiness but while placing individual happiness over moral philosophy (Dwyer 12).

In reporting violence with limited preconceived cultural and ethical concerns, media practitioners seem to promote individual or organisational goals as against fulfilling the social responsibility. The media practice on reporting violence and releasing the final media product for the consumers, without apprehension, is found to be diverging from the concept of peace journalism wherein the focus is on solutions rather than just propagating violence, but seems to be in accordance to apprehensions of experts of lack of ethical framework in reporting violence.

### **3.3.12 Practical Journalism: Decision Makers and on Field Reporters**

With media commercialisation, media houses are in constant run for escalating viewerships and readerships. More and more journalists are resorting to intrusive information gathering techniques for increasing the pace of production. In the rapid production of news, validation, verification, accuracy, authenticity and similar aspects are often at risk. And understanding locales and explaining it to the consumers is often skipped in the process of representing just facts and figures.

Profits depend on the cost of production, and in case of news it is “the cost of assembling the information and producing the stories” (Hamilton 2011: 15). Thus to keep the margins high media houses cut down upon the incentives provided to the journalists resulting in less means to acquire information and gather news. This reducing production costs, affects quality indirectly. Instead of travelling to the spot, getting first hand information, analysing facts and figures, authenticating and validating information; journalists bank upon sources. Along with being cost effective this also helps in gathering information quick and hassle free, pacing up the production process. And thus news becomes an individual interpretation of the field information, gathered from direct or indirect sources- may be witnesses or other via sources of information. And representation in media in news thus turns out to be representation of gathered information and perception of the one who collects and frames the story keeping in mind the target consumers, and not the reality (Mochahari).

The responses (Figure 3.25) on Decision Makers’ involvement and on Field Reporters may be categorised as below:

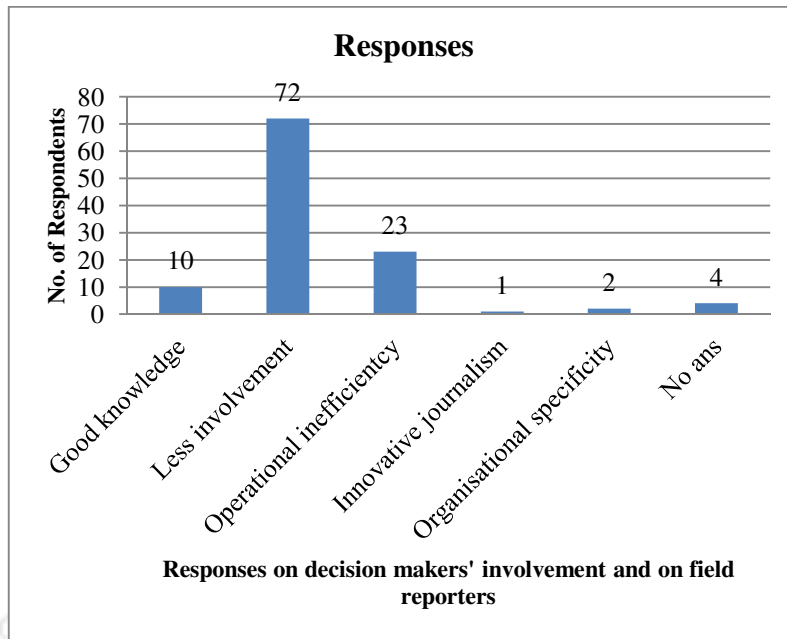


Figure 3.25: Responses on Decision Makers' Involvement and on Field Reporters

**Good knowledge:** The journalists are required to do proper field work to obtain facts and figures which make their story or program more authentic and representations proper. Believing this and reflecting upon the present regional media scenario, 9% respondents (Figure 3.25) were of the opinion that the media decision makers actually have good knowledge of ground realities and were aware of the place and event being dealt with in representations.

According to Copy Editor of English language newspaper:

*The media producers are very much involved with the journalists reporting from the field because without the latter, producers cannot package or prepare a news item for broadcast as the journalists on the spot are the ones to feed them with the accurate, updated and the required necessary information.*

According to News-coordinator (Assamese News) regional news channel:

*Without involvement there is no scope for a media house to function. From the editors to the DTP operators, all of them have to be in sync to make a media house function efficiently. Producing news is a team effort. Without cooperation from everyone and with everyone involved news producing cannot be possible. A reporter, news editor, video editor, panels, news producers and ticker operators are all in sync all most 24 hours a day.*

**Less involvement:** A majority of 64% respondents (Figure 3.25) were seen pointing at the very limited direct involvement of the media makers in the field of incidents. Apparently the producers or the actual decision makers, work from the desk at the

head offices and very rarely are actually present at the site of the event. In such situations the stringer or correspondent on field is often sort to for information and details. Sometimes information travels through a disorganised channel and reached the news room. In the process news is often partial information or a twisted or exaggerated fact. The decision makers have less knowledge and background information of the actual place or scenario leading to the final media reports being a mix of ideological perceptions, commercial element and event specific facts and figures.

According to Correspondent of an English language newspaper:

*Few of them are actually involved in with the place and event. Most journalists bank on stringers or freelancers to cover the news while some accord the responsibility to a few reporters to cover the whole of eight states.*

According to News Producer (Assamese and Assamese News) of a Regional television channel of Assam:

*This is actually one problem in media especially in news platform. In many occasions a journalist or a reporter does not report a first hand report. Some of them even browse through the websites of the rival channel and ultimately file the news. In television journalism browsing through the newspapers has become a common phenomenon. This is where the real incidents sometimes in overlooked and instances of wrong reporting occur. Therefore, news to be real and correct reporters should themselves be involved with the collecting of the reports from the sources.*

According to Senior Copy Editor of an English language newspaper published from Guwahati:

*Media producers are the media makers who set the agenda of a story like its angle, its focus on certain parts of the story and playing up or downplaying certain angles of the story.*

According to Producer (News) of a regional television channel:

*The producers seldom visit the site. The journalist and crew are involved to a great extent as they witness the incident; interact with victims, Government Authorities and in the course of reporting empathize with the situation/ victim.*

According to Desk editor and Assistant Producer of a regional television channel:

*As per experience the producers usually work from the main/head office from their respective desks and maintain contacts via phone and email. It is through contacts and sources only that producers acquire information, and most often the producers even modify, manipulate and even twist acquired facts accordingly to develop it into a news story.*

According to Correspondent of an English language newspaper of Assam:

*Very few media organizations are actually involved with the place and event. They have few correspondents who are made to cover a wide area and are given very little room to actually deliver the real picture.*

According to Correspondent of a regional newspaper organization:

*Journalists work for more professional way for discovering information. In the speed of production real scenario and facts is often missed out. Only the hyped info is got rest all is left out.*

According to Senior Asst. Editor (Guwahati edition) of a national English language newspaper organization:

*Obviously there are people who have never been in the field... on the other hand there are some genuine hard workers as well, but the distinction has become really difficult with everyone trying out shortcuts to fame.*

According to Staff reporter of a vernacular language newspaper:

*Not all journalists are involved in field operations. Most of the media makers depend upon sources and this is the sole cause of mis-informations, exaggerations and confusions in media as well as in its representations.*

According to a reporter/ copy writer of a vernacular language newspaper organisation in Assam:

*The decision makers are often at the head offices thus less aware with ground realities. There are stringers present at various distant places who report the story. This often leads to misrepresentation or wrong representations completely.*

**Operational inefficiency:** 21% respondents (Figure 3.25) point at the media houses' structure and functioning procedure which requires the decision makers in media usually the senior journalists to not personally visit the field but have junior journalists doing the initial field work. While some point to it as covering up distance issues and churning out news for the people at the earliest, some even refer to it as primary reason of mis-representations or generalised reporting in many cases.

According to Sub-editor of a regional English language newspaper:

*In most cases, the media producers are not at all involved with the event and the place. There are two aspects of it, both good and bad. By not being involved, you are being more objective in its coverage and the possibility of being biased is reduced. But then, it also raises the risk of incomplete coverage, erroneous news, and irresponsible journalism. The journalists are also no more involved in the place and event than what is required for making up a story.*

According to Desk Editor and Feature writer of a regional newspaper organisation:

*The journalists (reporters and field correspondents) are very much involved as they have to report from ground zero, the media producers or makers (editors and producers) not so much – as they make do with LIVE reporting by journalists and expert speakers.*

According to Regional correspondent of national newspaper's Guwahati edition:

*To furnish a detailed and sound report one needs to be on the ground always. But it is not the case that is always followed in actuality. Shortcuts are always applied in journalism too for either easy money or fame.*

According to Copy Editor of a regional vernacular language newspaper organisation:

*Media makers and journalists get themselves involved into the place and event as without knowing or realising the fact and situation proper justification can't be given to those issues.*

**Innovative journalism:** Newer aspects of journalism are being explored of late and need to be further explored to improve the quality of media representations, content and context wise. Only 1% respondents (Figure 3.25) referred to the changing aspect of journalism with more technological and instrumental advancement along with the highly competitive media market.

According to Editor of a regional television channel:

*Gauging the depth is important. We have to agree that with growing number of media houses and some who are driven by their passion to tell stories have changed the look of the profession over last few years.*

**Organisational specificity:** 2% of the respondents (Figure 3.25) felt that the involvement of journalists in various levels of the media production varies from organisation to organisation and person to person, depending upon organisational structure and hierarchy. Moreover from modes of media, from print to electronic, different organisations deal with different coverage procedures and decision making lies with varied levels of scrutiny and specifications in various media houses.

According to Sub-editor of a vernacular language (Bengali) newspaper from Assam:

*Depends on individuals and houses they are working for. It depends purely on an individual and how he/she covers an event. Of course at a large perspective, the group or the houses defines the core aspects of reportage, covering an event, etc. In big media houses the top level decision makers are usually not involved much with the field. More the journalist is established and has contacts sources, stringers, reporters come into play.*

According to News Producer of *Doordarshan News* based at Regional News Unit, Guwahati:

*Everything depends on the system which is created different sections setup man and machines. But all of them are well connected as it is a team effort, so individualistic point of view is not possible in this setup. But if the organisation or the media houses particularly supports some individuals, parties then it would be bias reporting. The person who is on screen is representing the whole story or the event on behalf of the team that works behind in case of television. Actually the person on the field has to inform the exact matter in right time and from location. But if he mismanages the things on the field from everything goes haywild. There are certain cases where the person is not present in the field then if he gets information through sources and whimsically he can pronounce the news on screen, it is his individualistic point of view. Some persons are on the field. And some are not present, but still filling a story is a huge responsibility on a field reporter. And most of the time the representatives are far away from the exact event spot. This causes lapses in information. And in today's context of fast and first information, information are at times manipulated, and misinformed. And in private channels mostly do anything to give out the news first, with no moral obligations for truth or authenticity.*

Skewed figures point at the problematic scenario in decision making and practicing being followed in the region. As is derived from the responses a large majority of practicing media persons talk of lesser involvement of decision makers in media in the process of news gathering from the field but possess maximum control over the finished media product. Most senior print journalists acknowledge the practice of not visiting the field personally for writing stories always. Instead they depend upon sources from locales for information from distant places. "Even telephonic information can be turned out into detailed reports of violence" confirm respondents. Even though television is blamed to be exaggerating facts but visuals are widely accepted to provide authenticity. As against this general perception, respondents from electronic media as well accepted dependency on various sources to beat distance and time. In most cases the journalist in field have not much editorial powers which instead lies with senior journalists at the media head offices situated in the state capitals and sometimes even other distant metropolitan city as well. It was further derived that decision making media practitioners from the electronic media industry are more alienated from the ground realities and field than the print media counterparts.

While there have been ample reported instances in electronic media where archived footages are used to demonstrate recent incidents in order to make representations look authentic, in case of print such cases are fewer as authenticating images are not mandatory, and lack of visuals are usually done away with texts, charts and graphs. “A complete cooked up story if appears in print it is potential enough to cause an impact like any other story” as mentioned by a freelance journalist of Assam.

### **3.4 Conclusion**

In an attempt to understand the pattern of representation of violence of media houses of Assam it was apparently found that Assam in media has been either under-representation or mis-representation, or stereotypical representation. This patterned projection with emphasis on violence beyond certain magnitude only may be attributed to agenda media, where media follows its own agenda. It is selective, sensationalist and extremists in content and context specific.

As was found from literature survey, it became more evident from the responses obtained from the survey population that through representations of facts and figures of violence the image of the region and society as a whole has been projected to the audience in a vulnerable state. The major intention of the media producers behind the patterned projection of Assam (as a part of the larger Northeast) through violence was apparently rooted to the commercial motive. One aspect contrary to the popular belief of the respondents of audiences outside the region to be disinterested and negligence towards Assam was found to be the misrepresentations that have created tainted perceptions about the region in the minds of people, media consumers. Little attempts made in focusing on other aspects of Assam, Northeast as a whole seem to have been accepted well by media consumers far and wide. Extensive violence reporting for long from the region seems to have created a perception of isolation of the region from mainland consciousness which only media has the potential to change and rectify with immense power of media representation.

In order to understand the media process of indentifying newsworthiness of an information and in converting it into a finished media product and leaving it in the market for consumers (viewers and readers) to consume, it becomes important to

understand the producer and also identify the target audience of the particular media product who are being served with the information gathered, processed, packaged and presented. It was also confirmed that most of the decision making and production procedure of news about Assam especially on content and context exhibit homogeneity. While “herd mentality” of media practitioners is found to be a significant instrument in churning out similar patterned media products from the region, the constant “outlet pressure” under which journalists have to perform may be seen as another explanation for the same (Tekwani 91). Apparently there is limited room for experimentation with newer content, as deviating from the existing trend and topic is seen as a threat to existence and excellence in the commercialised media industry.

Worth mentioning is the mainstream media attitude towards the northeast. In informing the public as what media producers convincingly describe as serving the society by informing about happenings from remotest part of the country what national media is usually found to be doing is serving only a particular section of the population-target audiences, with certain kind of information, selected and patterned in accordance to existing trends and generalised interest areas. This attitude, mostly in mainstream media, may be criticised as serving only to a specific regional mindset, mainland India concentrating on metros which does not accommodate marginalised region or people in media terms and also does not look beyond boundaries of content and context.

Analysing responses, views gathered from available literature and selected archives confirm that journalism in Assam has been more or less reporting of violence with emphasis on facts and figures. Surviving in the competitive media industry becomes more important than following individual desires and expectation from media to work towards the social responsibility. As experts have pointed out earlier, with data and analysis, how ostensibly objective journalism helps to collectively promote the what may be said to be the “predominant perception of a violent reality and the encoding of an entire narrative of violence for social consumption” (Domínguez-Ruvalcaba and Corona 113). Respondents even subtly pointed at hidden political agendas which work behind specific patterned projection of the region.

As per Galtung and Ruge's suggested hypothesis, news is about *selection*, *distortion* and *replication* of events depending upon the 12 major news factors- frequency, threshold, unambiguity, meaningfulness, consonance, unexpectedness, continuity, composition, reference to elite nations, reference to elite people, reference to persons, reference to something negative:

1. The events are more likely to be registered as news if they satisfy more of the mentioned criterias (*selection*).
2. In the selected news items the newsworthy element will be accordingly accentuated (*distortion*).
3. The process of selection and distortion will take place in all steps in the chain from event to reader (*replication*) (Galtung and Ruge 1965: 60-61)

Though the generalisation of the proposed hypothesis were questioned by some experts (Schulz, Wilke, etc.), and various other factors have also been identified over the period of time, the concept forwarded by Galtung and Ruge provides the basic framework for understanding the intentions and criteria behind the process of developing a mere information into a piece of news. Even today journalists verifying newsworthiness are seen referring to the twelve points. Similarly Evensen points out "conflict" to be one of the primary factors delivering news value to any event along with consequence, timeliness, proximity, prominence, and human interest angle (Evensen 1997: 140-141). While other factors determining newsworthiness are figured out as impact, drama, visual attractiveness, brevity, recency by experts; "negativity" is emphasised by many (Galtung and Ruge 1965; Hall 2013; etc.) to be of utmost importance in news selection and newsworthiness verification. "Natural or man-made violence, conflict, disaster, or scandal" are some of the important elements which establish the desired negativity in media productions (Johnson-Cartee 2005: 126).

As Judy McGregor concludes in her work (2002), "Negative events with vivid, graphic pictures and an emotional sub-text, often presented with journalistic self-promotion, will be chosen to lead today's news". In the present day context, more than content, *visualness* is given importance in news selection and representation, clubbed with *emotions* and *conflict*. "What is selected and presented as news is driven by

pictures and their perceptual and iconic power” (124). Similar views were also reflected in survey responses as well, the emphasis on reporting with self-explanatory images and visuals seemed to be preferred to background research or follow-up stories of violence.

The challenges that reporters always face in news business are “time pressure and deadlines”, and with improving technology providing "news instantaneously to a wide audience has become even more important (Evensen 1997: 170). Furthermore with such work environment and industry demands what apparently looks lucrative for media practitioners from the region is to practice and follow the popular trend of reporting of violence to earn living and gain popularity in media. On the other hand geographically and also psychologically it is considered difficult by the mainstream media practitioners to reach the location to explain events and explore region. This leads to patterned representation of selected instances of violence. The cause of selective and limited coverage of the region as evident from the responses and available literature echoes Rajdeep Sardesai’s (Editor-in-Chief of Indian media house, IBN18 Network) views that the entire North-East seems to suffer from the “tyranny of distance”, which makes it difficult for media to reach the exact location of violence on time, thus enhancing possibilities of missing out details, misunderstanding and misrepresentation of violence (Sardesai).

Reporting of violence apparently seems to be the distinctive feature of news reporting as violence is often considered the “real stuff” of journalism. It may not be incorrect to say that media consumers are curious and interested in stories about violence, crime, war, unrest, etc. but it also is equally true that such preferences have been cultivated over ages of media itself. And yet another fact is that no matter how, journalists strive to be objective, balanced and fair about reporting an issue, event or place; they reproduce mere patterned coverage of violence following trends. These are often legitimated views and actions of those in positions of power in society; and also of those media makers responsible for the media representation. (Carter and Weaver 2003: 40)

An important aspect of journalism practices in the Northeast and the mainstream media intervention is overcoming the distance from the mainland India and gather information and project it back. Mainstream media houses work on extensive second-hand information of the incidents and work upon preordained knowledge of the region as a whole to produce acceptable news stories. In the regional field as well there are very limited numbers of media representatives spread across the region and thus only few travel and compensate the insufficiency of professionals. As a result many a times reporters or stringers reach the spot only after the flare of incident has already finished. This not only does delay information, but it also gives scope of lot of word of mouth facts to be taken as facts. Moreover the decision making powers lie upon media persons in head offices and not the ones in field collecting information or shooting visuals. In this media scenario individual prejudices and organisational ideology play vital role in shaping up of the story angle, identifying the perpetrators and victims and also judgmental media passing fundamental verdicts in case of conflicts and violence.

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## **Chapter IV**

### **Violence, Gender and Ethnicity Issues in Assam and the Northeast**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

As evident in Chapter III the media practitioners' perspectives play decisive role in determining the media content. In terms of Northeast news reaching out to a widespread media consumers, mainstream media plays a significant role. This chapter looks into the fundamentals of the mainstream media- national newspapers or television news channels mostly based in Delhi (and metros) with huge spread with viewership/readership throughout the nation and abroad. Apparently the mainstream approves of and accepts only certain level or categories of violence- the conventional violence. These forms of violence and their representation are mostly in accordance to the popular audience beliefs and media understanding in relation to any particular place, region, events or people. Certain criteria that work well for any information to be easily accepted and picked by the national mainstream media are these instances of conventional violence.

An exploratory inquiry into issues related to violence, gender and ethnicity; specific to media representations of Assam in particular was conducted. Responses were obtained from 112 respondents to get first hand information on the subject matter. These interview transcripts served as the primary sources of data for content analysis. The analysis process was inductive and took a grounded theory approach with the interview transcripts emerging into categories on their own.

Survey responses on violence, gender and ethnicity issues of Assam and northeast through media representation of 112 media persons' are given in a summarised form below:

#### **4.2. Gender Constructions in Reporting of Violence**

Conflict and violence have largely been accepted as domains of the male gender in society. With particular reference to Assam, representation of conflict and violence has not been gender sensitive to a large extent; and if at all it may be attributed to

gender issues at times, violence has predominantly been attributed to the men only, especially by media. In the male dominated media industry, representation of violence is generally understood as stories focusing on conflicts, from execution of violence, military, authorities, to peace initiatives which are male matters, with male point of views represented. Available literature regarding representation of violence has very limited mention of gender distinctions, but undoubtedly the focus usually has been on the men of the society. Though some amount of work on violence, in the region with political, ethnic, regional undertones and also from the impact point of view have been carried on, there has been no significant amount of work done on gender issues in relation to instances of violence as well as reporting of violence in Assam.

As mentioned in a report of National Commission for Women on Assam and Manipur (2004) “Political violence and armed conflict have been largely male domains, executed by men, whether as armed forces, guerrilla forces, paramilitary or peacekeeping forces.” Also scant literature available on such conflict situations are gender blind, with women’s participation simply not visible with reference to the northeast (The North East Network Report). The report further states that “The lack of recognition of women’s involvement during armed conflict whether as perpetrators or victims means that they are doubly discriminated in re-integration interventions for conflict-affected populations”. Furthermore, as revealed in study conducted on women in media “women's issues in the Indian media are still, by and large, seen as narrow, niche issues and covered as such as dramatic or lurid cases of violence or discrimination and continue to receive more coverage than other equally important issues. Superficiality, sensationalism and insensitivity frequently mark such coverage while serious coverage of significant gender-related events is often lost in the carpet coverage accorded to trivial pursuits” (Rai).

In the present study in an attempt to analyse gender disparity in media representation (if any) with reference to reporting of violence in Assam, media content and intensions of media practitioners were studied. Broadly looking at the media scenario, it is presumed that in most cases the gender association with representation in violence is usually not neutral to gender. Specifically it may be said that two facets of looking at gender related violence exists, one- domestic violence which affects

individuals separately with diverse circumstances; and second- violence caused due to conflict outside the domestic periphery which collectively affects many. As the present study intends to study and focus on representation of the collective violence situations, thus domestic violence and individual case of gender related violence were kept out of the study. In this context the emphasis is on gender discriminations in media portrayals of violence situations outside the home which mostly are cases of “high levels of militarisation, lack of legal deterrents, ongoing ethnic conflicts, and targeted violence by security forces and rival militant groups” (McDuie-Ra 122-123) in case of Assam and the entire Northeast.

#### **4.2.1 Media Representation of Violence: Gender Aspects**

In an attempt to analyse gender perspectives of media representations while reporting violence the emphasis was laid on studying representation of women in conflict situations. Women in particular have constantly been marginalised in conflict reporting situations (Keeble et al. 106). Most important aspect of gender representation in conflict reporting is that women are more frequently portrayed as victims (Aolain et al., Seethaler, et al., Kaufman, Lynch, etc.). The media logic that results in differently representing men and women, marginalising women may be concluded as the tendency to be on the powerful side, the male side (Keeble et al. 117).

The best example of covering violence extensively and targeting women as victims can be seen at the coverage of the 24 November 2007 incident in Beltola, Guwahati (see Image 25, 26, 27). Assam was in news when an Adivasi rally turned violent, recalled respondent Nava Thakuria, senior journalist and media expert and “all for the wrong reason”. The so called mainstream media mostly based outside the region, projected the incident as ‘unprovoked attack’ on the already marginalised. Nava Thakuria in his article (2007) too, disputes the accuracy of the media content, and points at missed information or deliberately ignored representation of attempts by locals to rescue and shelter the victims; and moreover it was not a collective violence initiated by locals but repercussion to some extent. Forgetting all ethics and rules to be observed in depicting a victim of violence, media in this case exposed the girl who was stripped in broad daylight (see Image 25, 26, 27). The purpose evidently was

selling media product through direct depiction of violence and the victim. In the attempt to sensationalise the incident, with repeated telecasts and revealing images in print for over a period of time, the mainstream representations made the incident look more of a regular accepted event in the region. Had the media apparently been more sensitive to the cause, the political and historical significance of the agitation known, media depictions and well as understanding about the region would have been altered from what it has become today to the rest of the world media consumers.

The above depiction of the Beltola incident in Guwahati seems to be in tune to popular understanding of depiction of women as eternal victims of violence. Significant amount of work suggests that women victims in conflict and post conflict situations feel exploited by media (Aolain et al. 166) more than the actual event.

Apart from constant victimisation, media in publicising their sufferings, brings to them further trauma in the course of representations. Its noteworthy to mention that in my personal experience, even after three years of a bomb blast in Guwahati at the time of programming a show, a widowed women who lost her auto-rickshaw driver husband (sole bread earner of the family of six members) in the blast, left with two children was confronted again and again by local media to narrate the story of violence and loss for the audiences. The journalists seeking stories in search for a human angle story not only represented the women as victim of violence, and recreated the original violent through employing various original images and graphics but also further traumatised the victim in the representation of media. She was seen refusing to talk to media, explaining it only aggravates her pains and losses. The torture by the incident itself is grave, but narrating it a several times, recreating and being pushed by the journalists to feel and convey the pain on screen to the viewers to make a good, attractive programme is even more disturbing. Moreover in pursuit of depicting the real and the prove real time authenticity by media, the violence affected people are also made to talk directly to the camera for television or be clicked for print and narrate their stories of sufferings (see Image 18, 19, 20, 23) which is again expected to interest and attract media consumers. Probably the media tendency in doing so may translate into more the pain put for show, more the readers/viewers get attracted to the particular programme; it results in increase in print circulation or TRP

gains. Thus fulfilling the commercialisation criteria of media representation, rampant reporting of violence is spotted with victimisation with necessary female angle to it. During conflict situations, media undoubtedly highlights the vulnerability of women, but on the other hand “they rarely report on strong women working to promote peace and human rights” (Keeble et al. 106).

A monitoring study, carried on in 1997 on how Sri Lankan media was covering issues relating to violence against women, found that “the women’s perspective was seldom reported, and her dignity and privacy were frequently abused” (Gallagher 99). The second monitoring covering a wider range of media in 1998 apart from confirming the previous findings highlighted on a slight positive trend, “an increase in the representation of women as survivors” (99). In a similar study on representation trend in Bangladesh media it was found that “victims of violence in Bangladesh are perceived as women who have violated male directives and are therefore justifiably subject to punishment” (Khondaker). Also in certain instances where the female victims of violence are identified as belonging to the minority groups, the violence is even considered strategic (Khondaker). In Sri Lanka Women’s Rights Watch apparently recommends training for media policy –makers and journalists in gender-sensitive reporting and feature writing, and also suggests more women journalists require to be assigned coverage of violence against women for adequate coverage and representation (Samuel 1999, Gallagher 97, etc).

As derived from literature survey, there have been attempts made in various other situations in different places to figure out the prevailing trends in media regarding representation of women in conflict situations. But similar attempts are not known to have been made for the conflict situations in Assam or the northeast and the related media functioning. Lack of such study outcome in the region, with no research on actual industry functioning, analysis of facts being represented, identification of improvement scopes and improvement in representation for the societal benefit, may be said to be the cause for a lot to be left desired in the continuing media practices.

The responses (Figure 4.1) on Media Representation of Violence: Gender Aspects may be categorised as below:

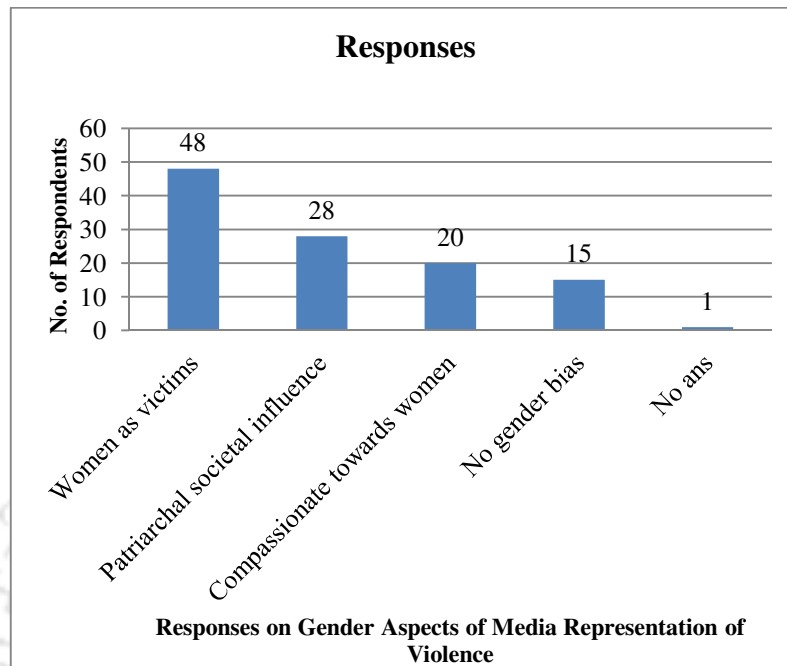


Figure 4.1: Responses on Media Representation of Violence: Gender Aspects

**Women as victims:** Gender aspects of media representation of violence are apparently more focused on the priority given to women in relation to the violence. The basic question that needs to be answered to figure out the gender aspect of representation of violence is if women are targeted as victims by media and if violence against women is given any priority than other related aspects of violence. 43% of respondents (Figure 4.1) apparently asserted to media representation of violence against women being given priority in media. Most news portrayals of violence decisively depict “women as victims” as news makers believe victimisation of women is a sensational aspect of violence which in turn attracts audiences, resulting in commercial gains. However, the taken fact has been that women are vulnerable and the worst victims of most violence situations.

While some of the respondents criticised the prevailing approach of reporting on violence with major focus on women victimisation only and neglecting other related issues; another section of respondents from the media industry reflected an understanding that victimisation was one of the most approved way of reporting to any incident of violence with women in focus. However most of the news reports on violence by regional, national and even international media houses are seen to be

giving maximum coverage to women in violent situations, portraying them as victims and highlighting their plight, representing it as a sensational, attention grabbing indulgence. If not directly pronouncing the stereotypical projection of women as victim in conflict situations, media tends to put across the message through powerful images and visuals (see Image 10, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 28).

According to a Senior Correspondent from the print media:

*Women are often targeted as victims as it has been both historically seen and accepted since ages. Also most views represented by women are sometimes strictly confined to women related or developmental issues with little room for participation in serious security related issues.*

According to Senior Production Engineer of a regional television news channel:

*There are certain images that we tend to identify with, the most likely to occur incidents and situations; women as victims in one such image. We as media and people on the other side- the viewers have accepted the fact that in any given situation of violence it is the female section who suffer the most and their grievances needs to be addressed. It is also seen that, the news makers give more priority to victims, to create sensationalism in such instances relating to women, to increase TRPs.*

According to News coordinator of a regional television news channel:

*Violence against women is a priority but our representation does not target women in any way. We try to bring to the notice of the people the hidden truths, the missed out details and ground realities. When such grave incidents are happening around us then why can't we report on them and moreover women are vulnerable enough to be the worst victims of any violent situations and we need to address the cause. To report on them is our duty and it's the best way to deal with the coverage of violence when women are involved.*

Echoing similar views was Editor in Chief of regional television news channel who also is a freelance contributor to National English language Newspapers:

*The worst victims in any riot situation are undoubtedly the women. In Assam context, the riot relief camps are full of women and children. We try to focus on human interest stories, individual stories of suffering and violence when it comes to reporting of violence and thus the unintentional focus falls on women, the worst victims of riots, ethnic clashes, conflicts, ideological wars, displacements and so on.*

According to Senior Programme Producer of a regional television Channel:

*Recent incidents have made it prominent that women and related issues interest audiences. Atrocities against women, issues related to violence against women, rape cases, cases of molestations have been figuring in news all over the media. In situations where thousands of people are victims of violence, the plight of women is obviously more. And in attempting proper*

*representation of the violence and its affect on life, concentration on the women victims is but an obligation. Woman exposed to violence in any case is given priority in media.*

It is apparent that women are treated mostly as victims while representing instances of violence. While most of the respondents emphasis on the existing trend and acceptance of women being victims of any adverse situation, few also add on to the issue pointing at increasing crime against women in the society to be the root cause of women being represented more and more as victims of such atrocities which are not limited to mass violence but also has individual target cases of violence. As Desk Editor and Feature writer of an English language newspaper in Assam points out:

*It depends on the nature of crime, if it is a terrorist attack by way of explosion/bombing or shooting, women per se are not always necessarily the targeted victims. But when it comes to hate crimes (throwing acid, kidnapping or torture) and/or rape, they are the main targets. In any case we need to figure out the worse sufferers of the incident, in most cases women are, and thus we happen to frame the story accordingly.*

According to Producer (News) of a regional television news channel:

*Women in Indian society have always been considered to be main root of violence. We have Ramayana and Mahabharata which all started with women. Yes, definitely a case of rape, sexual assault sells more in which women are the victims. On the other hand, in few recent cases support of media has facilitated to solve the cases and punish the criminals.*

It is noteworthy that though as section belonging to a particular gender, females according to the respondents, who are usually considered to be the second gender, is often branded as the worst victims of the violence acts in Assam by media (see Image 12, 15, 18, 21, 23) seem to overlook that fact that declaring a person as ‘victim’ is against the ethical practice of journalism. The term may only be used to describe the survivor only with the consent of the individual.

**Patriarchal societal influence:** 25% of respondents (Figure 4.1) refer to the patriarchal mindset of the society including the media producers that has lead to women in media being projected in a particular manner when reported in relation to violence occurrences. The power in media lies with the men with very less or no women at the top of the media houses making decisions. So the viewpoint of the news reports is, primarily that of the men. This is also one reason why the stories on

violence are projected in a certain patterned manner with focus on women. In news reports violence against women is given more priority than other factors.

The patriarchal society and men at the control of media matters have resulted apparently in the male view being translated into the media representations. As Producer (Assamese news) of a regional television news channel puts it:

*Since we follow a patriarchal society whatever happens to women will always be looked with a different eye. The stories reported are by and large the male version of the story. The women oriented stories representing violent situations are very seldom, on the brave and inspiring' but mostly they are on vulnerability, hopelessness and are sad.*

According to Assistant Editor of a regional television news channel:

*Media in Assam is gripped with chauvinism and a patriarchal look at violence—many present violence against women in a way as if it was the woman's fault that she was subjected to that violence. 'Blaming the victim' for the crime has been the media view of things and representations.*

According to Sub Editor of a vernacular language newspaper organisation:

*While reporting on violence it is mostly the male perspective that gets reflected in the representation of the event or situation. While violence against women gets the maximum coverage, the reports may substantially also be criticised of sensationalising the issue and thus commodifying the news item.*

According to freelance journalist reporting for Assam:

*Not only are the women mostly presented as victims but then again questions on their character are made in the news reports, in case of violence against women. This may be said to be the male influence in media content and context.*

**Compassionate towards women:** 18% respondents (Figure 4.1) opined media reports seem to be compassionate towards women, especially when they are victims of any kind of violence.

According to Senior Editor of regional television news channel:

*In my view media is portraying actual picture of the society. Rape cases, eve teasing, molestation cases are increasing day by day where women are victimised. Media in this case acts more sensitively in favour of the victim- for example the recent Delhi gang rape case, Guwahati molestation case and many more of similar kinds.*

According to Additional Deputy Director News of DD News, Guwahati:

*In Northeast, women are given a special privilege by communities. Some even follow the matrilineal structure of society, where women are considered the head of the family, such as*

*Garo, Khasi or Jaintia communities. Not only are the women the sole heir to the entire family property and head of rituals, the siblings also add the mother's surname. So here in the region, the scenario is quite different from the other parts of the country. Only in cosmopolitan areas atrocities on women are reported, which is again much lesser than the scenario in other parts of the country. Media highlights facts only to prevent atrocities and provide justice to the victims. In Assam negative representation of women is very less. Also atrocities against women have declined due to the fear of projection.*

**No gender bias:** 13% respondents (Figure 4.1) discarded any kind of practice of gender bias being followed in media in representing violence. This also meant that this section of respondents were denying the practice of any particular gender being represented as victims only or priority been given in media representations of violence against the gender per se.

It is worth mentioning a majority of 76% of the respondents referred to inappropriate representation of gender issues in media in respect to reporting of violence, stereotyped as victims or presented in backdrop of quintessentially patriarchal society point of view. None of the respondents while responding on pattern of representation of women covering the entire northeastern region mentioned about Irom Sharmila, the "Iron Lady of Manipur". As an elaborate headline and sub-headline of a National Newspaper mentions "15 years and counting: Irom Sharmila's protest against AFSPA: Irom Sharmila has been on a hunger strike since November 2000, demanding the repeal of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act" (2015), this apparently makes an important coverage while talking of the violence scenario in the region and an absolutely different form of protest by a woman. But the survey derivations with no mention of her, makes it clear that such instances are deprived media space and time due to media ignorance and lack of regional media practitioners' awareness, thus goes rarely and superficially reported by the mainstream media as well.

There have been several instances where gender constructions in reporting of violence from the region have been found inappropriate. In the case of Laxmi Orang (see Image 25, 26, 27) "being an Adivasi woman it is not surprising that Laxmi's case did not get any attention that the gravity of the case demanded. The reason for the apathy was that she was not even an 'Assamese' woman" (Misri 130). In the Guwahati molestation case of 2012, footages were repeatedly played on television channels over

discussions with slight blurring in most cases (see Image 29, 31) and also identity revealed. There have been numerous instances of portraying collective violence as women victimisation majorly in print (see Image 12, 28), in television (see Image 21, 23) and also the internet with web versions of newspapers and television media houses (see Image 22, 24). It is found that though context specific at individual level at community level it is more of a generic representation evoking sympathy.

#### 4.2.2 Media Representation of Women Perpetrators of Violence

There are various instances in India where women have participated in riots as perpetrators of violence- “in 1984 riots, in the destruction of the Ayodhya Mosque in 1992, in communal violence in Bombay in 1992 and 1993, and in separatist movements in Kashmir, Assam, and Punjab” (Žarkov 226). This deviates from the general “feminist concerns with violence, in which women are cast as victims” as against the image where "violence is perpetrated by women" (226). Similarly in the regional scenario it needs to be looked into as to how women perpetrators of violence, women in association with extremist groups in particular, are represented in media (regional as well and mainstream media). However, the shift from women figuring in popular consciousness as victims, to women being represented as the perpetrator in relation to violence, is a concept quite not in favour of the predominant mindset of a patriarchal society, and is yet to be explored, accepted and practiced by media.

The responses (Figure 4.2) on Media Representation of Women Perpetrators of Violence may be categorised as below:

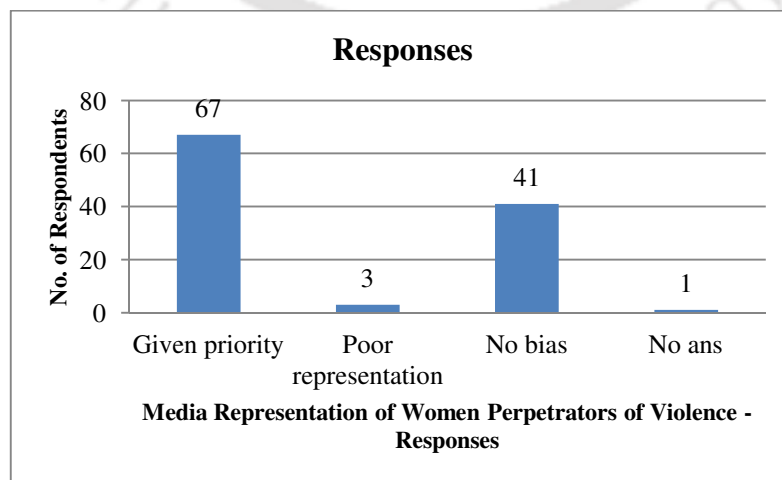


Figure 4.2: Responses on Media Representation of Women Perpetrators of Violence

**Given priority:** 60% respondents (Figure 4.2) opine that female perpetrators of violence are given prominence in media. Here according to respondents, female perpetrators of violence also include those who have been associated with some extremist groups which have been engaged into subversive activities. The presentation in media may be portraying the negative light or in positive light

According to Production Engineer (News) of a regional television news channel:

*In most cases their identity is disclosed and even faces are shown, which usually is against the said norm of representation of violence and women laws. There is definite need to sensitise the media regarding such gender related ethics and representation issues.*

According to Senior Copy Editor of a regional English language newspaper:

*Generally, the women ultras are portrayed as ultras only. However, sometimes their family life is deliberated upon by media, which at times does generate sympathy for the women.*

According to Freelance journalist reporting for Northeast:

*In mainstream media their portrayal is mostly stereotyped and pre-perceived as that of anti-socials who are responsible for the worsening condition or the deterioration of the social and cultural atmosphere of the society.*

According to News Producer of a regional television channel:

*Women are stereotyped as obedient, docile, submissive in our society, when any other aspect of their personality comes in focus, interest is spontaneously generated and the issue turns out as eye-catching. All the aspects associated with the women are considered and covered.*

According to Senior Producer (News and current affairs) of a regional television channel:

*Yes, this is true when we see wives of top leaders of the extremist, because most of them get the benefit of being the wives of top leaders. Sometimes they are even glorified of their courage and attitudes.*

According to Desk editor and Feature writer of a regional newspaper organisation:

*It is important to note that extremist groups in the Northeast belong to a certain tribe/community, the rights of which they are fighting for. In my opinion, the extremist groups which have women rebels as members become more scary in the eyes of the media/general public- as it gives out the message that their fight is so dire that women have left their hearth and home to come out and wield guns for their rights.*

According to CEO and Content Editor of a regional television news channel:

*Women associated with extremist groups are given a lot of prominence in media reports. The classic example may be cited that of the lady from Tinsukia – Janhabi Mahanta, who had joined ULFA in 2012, and gained so much news spaces in the regional media. It wouldn't be wrong to say that she almost became a celebrity in the eyes of media.*

According to Editor of a vernacular language newspaper organisation:

*ULFA leader's wife was portrayed as a woman with whom people can connect as a common being. Broadcast media to print media shows her interview with emphasis on her struggle and her personal life. Many times she was portrayed in a glorified image rather than her association with an extremist group. I would say this is a very biased way of reporting wherein media tries to propagate popular ideology through the female personified identity.*

Stories of violence mostly deal with facts and figures of affected describing the magnitude of violence (section 3.2.11). Apparently there are fewer known reported instances in Assam where female perpetrators have been the focal point of media representations of violence. Of the few instances reported, it is mostly seen that women associated with violence spreading groups are given coverage based on two distinctive views according to respondents. First that reflects the media makers' personal preferences and ideologies which glorify women who have dared to come out of the confinements and stereotypes to fight for a cause with violence. Second that states some media practitioners consider gender and context specific media representation as mere media exaggeration as respondents seem unsatisfied with the added media attention given to the female perpetrators of violence. With this the question arises if oversimplifications of facts or exaggerations are right on the part of media.

**Poor representation:** 3% respondents opine that the representation of women associated with extremist groups is poor

**No bias:** 37% respondents (Figure 4.2) opine that no exceptional media space or time is provided specifically for women perpetrators of violence in media.

According to Assistant Producer (English News) of a regional television channel:

*Not much difference. But, yes their association to the extremist group is clearly mentioned and the emphasis is on how they were associated with the outfit.*

According to News coordinator of a regional television news channel:

*There are very few women who are associated with extremists groups and we tend to do whatever is necessary to present the news in the most balanced way.*

According to Correspondent (City News) of a regional English language newspaper from Assam:

*Women associated with extremist groups are often represented as equally ruthless and hardcore or generally as allies to the leaders who are simply following mindlessly without questioning.*

According to Freelance journalist reporting for Assam in mainstream media:

*They are anti-social elements. Any militancy whether male or female are treated as same as any other criminals or the way a militant or an anti-social is treated. If anyone harm the integrity sovereignty and the peaceful atmosphere of the country is treated as same. But if they surrender or come to peace talks, especial privilege used to be given to them according to the law. So if after surrender or on negotiation tables if there are women cadres then local media are highlighting any kind of bad behaviour towards them, on the grounds on basic human rights act.*

The notion of media representation of women perpetrators of violence seem to theoretically differ of one section of respondents from the other drastically. Whereas the major section of respondents believes that women as perpetrators of violence, or with strong association with extremist group are given more priority in media, a considerable section also believes that no such gender bias functions in media representation of violence with any kind of prominence or media space and time allotted to any particular gender. It is noteworthy that a section of regional media respondents make references to the ULFA and reflect a certain kind of soft corner for the group, with some even reflecting feeling of awe for the female cadres. The other section of 37% of respondents though stress upon no biasness in representation of violence in media in respect to the gender of the perpetrators. But on a more generalised note it was derived from the responses that the concept of women as perpetrators of violence in contrast to widely accepted and practiced representation of women as the perennial victim has very little scope in media to be explored or exploited. Moreover this notion of women other than being the victim is undesirable as it is apparently considered deviating from the known norms of media representation and thus seem contesting the media producers' as well as consumers' perceptions.

### 4.2.3 Effect of Violence on Women: Media Priority

Talking about a “defined hierarchy in the sociology of the victim” Valerie Gorin in his essay “An Iconography of Pity and a Rhetoric of Compassion: War and Humanitarian Crises in the Prism of American and French Newsmagazines (1967-95)” says that age and gender play vital roles in determining victim imagery and shaping media products (Seethaler et al. 146). The perceived weaker sections of the population- women, children and the elderly, are portrayed as the eternal victims of any conflict. Thus media plays up their images in contrast to the conflict to “sell” news.

As is found in cases of representation of most conflict situations and gender bias, attention predominantly is on women to illustrate impact of violence in the Northeast (see Aolain et al., Banerjee, Kaufman, Lynch, Seethaler, et al., etc). Apparently female victims are presented from a masculine point of view, with media portrayals often downplaying their victimisation (Khondaker 118). Further stigmatisations of female victims are done based on other related identities such as “race, ethnicity, immigration status, or social class” (Khondaker 118-119).

The responses (Figure 4.3) on Effect of Violence on Women: Media Priority may be categorised as below:

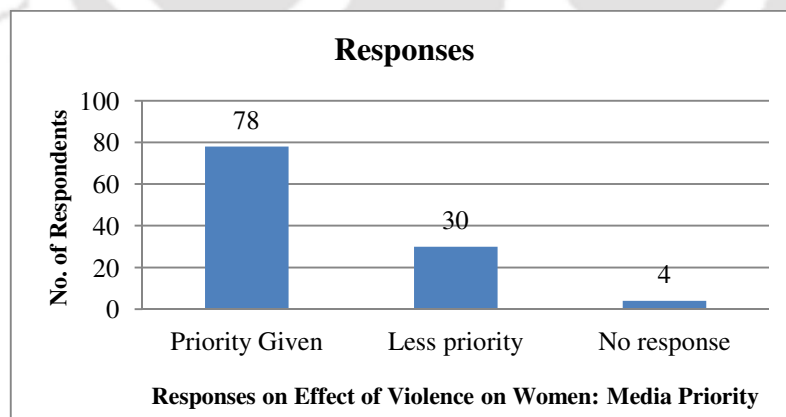


Figure 4.3: Responses on Effect of Violence on Women: Media Priority

**Priority given:** 70% respondents (Figure 4.3) accept that the female population affected in violence situations and events are given priority in media over others in media representation of the violent incident. (see Image 10, 12, 14, 15, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28)

According to Senior Copy Editor of a regional English language newspaper:

*Most of the times, stories related to violence concerning women are dramatised by the vernacular media like their treatment of all other beats. In the national media, unless the media house concerned takes it up like a campaign, the story dies a natural death after some days when other stories crop up.*

According to Sub-editor of a regional newspaper organisation:

*Violence on women and its aftermath has been selling like hot cakes in the media market and it continues to be the same even today. I don't see any change taking place in near future too.*

According to Producer (News) of a regional television news channel:

*Many a times yes because the society looks at woman and man from a little different perspective. For example if the girl in GS Road, Guwahati would have been a boy the matter would not have been that serious. There would not have been much hue and cry among the people because it happens to man every now and then. Woman issues are always prioritized.*

According to Programme Producer of a regional television news channel:

*Yes, they are more highlighted than other issues. Media is flooded with news of rape, domestic violence, physical harassment, sexual allegations etc. Moreover it is seen in incidents of mass violence- women and children are given special coverage and mostly portrayed as victims. Such themes usually gain viewer sympathy, attention and thus viewership.*

According to Desk Editor and Feature writer of a regional English language newspaper organisation:

*Definitely women affected in violence are given priority, number one case in point being instances of rape. Although that is the case, the media representation has not helped in any way to bring down the number of crimes. Violence may be directed to an individual or too many, but women as victim serves news value and always gains priority in news.*

According to Assistant Producer (English News) of a regional television news channel:

*Image of women portrayed as victims is of more news value. Detailed reports on violence affected female population, is usually used for increasing the news-selling value of the story. It makes the story's representation sensational and more appealing.*

Apart from echoing the above, effect of violence on women been given priority in media content, News coordinator of a regional television news channel revealed that media houses even pressurise the journalists to cover and follow certain violent occurrence with special story angle on female victims.

*In most of the cases women in instances of violence are given priority coverage. Violence against women is of high priority for almost all the media houses in the state (Assam). Most of them have a strict policy to pursue the matter where a woman or a child is the victim of violence.*

According to Freelance journalist of Assam:

*Yes. Women have always been commoditized in media, whether in advertisement campaigns or in representation of oppression etc including violence. The priority is not social concern, but selling proposition.*

According to Staff Reporter of a vernacular language newspaper of Assam:

*Basic media norms are that women and children are given first priority in showing effects of any violence situation. To ensure the compensation of the treatment facilities to the highest convenient way to be provided to them is the important role of media. The media in this part of India take utmost measures to present reports in their capacity to the public and also to authorities. As media here, the local media is not much experienced and is still a growing industry; cross-checks and balances of information and figures are sometimes lacking. But more or less every media wants to project any incident, may it be violence or anything else, from the locals point of view, giving it due priority.*

**Less priority:** In attempting consolidation of facts and figures in representation of violence, 27% of respondents (Figure 4.3) suggested that not always is effect of violence on women given priority over others. Apparently in generalised report of violence instances, no priority is given based on gender distinctions.

According to Senior Copy Editor of a regional English language newspaper:

*In the national media, unless the media house concerned takes it up like a campaign, the story dies a natural death after some days when other similar stories crop up. It is rare that individual stories of affected women are taken up as priority news in media.*

According to News Producer of a regional television news channel:

*I think stories of violences are chosen according to the degree of their grossness. The more unusual and cruel it is the better is the policy. Nevertheless, violence's do find their due space and time slots irrespective of the gender associations.*

According to Senior Correspondent of an English language newspaper of Assam:

*The effects of violence on women are not generally given any priority over others apart from portraying a sorry and helpless figure to gain audience sympathy at times. Very rarely are follow up stories done on violence affected people. Mostly only the incident gets projected with prominent facts and figures with mere numbers affected and no further details or priority.*

In regard to media preference of projecting violence with specific focus on women, there have been certain instances in Assam and from Northeast which stand as strong examples of the media prejudice. It is also seen that at times when the factual representation does not focus on women victimisation or representation of women related to violence incidents, media often attempts visual implications of projecting women as victims. Here again comes in the issue of dealing with women of different backgrounds differently. While some are treated as victims with sympathy, some projections have the undercurrent of justifying the violence against them. As a respondent reacted “*good that they are hurt... they needed to be treated like this*), the immaturity of media professional along with resentment for a certain group of people was evident and is also makes it obvious that without check the particular feeling is sure to be reflected in some media product some time or the other. A new generation of feminists are challenging normative readings of women and war which present all women as victims of conflict perpetrated by men (Holmes 2013:266).

#### **4.2.4 Role of Women Journalists in Representation of Violence**

Violence is seen as a domain of men, be it reporters (field journalists) or decision makers of media. Therefore it remains to be examined what role the women journalists play in representation in media, especially representation of considered significant issues in media representations like violence.

The responses (Figure 4.4) on Role of Women Journalists in Representation of Violence may be categorised as below:

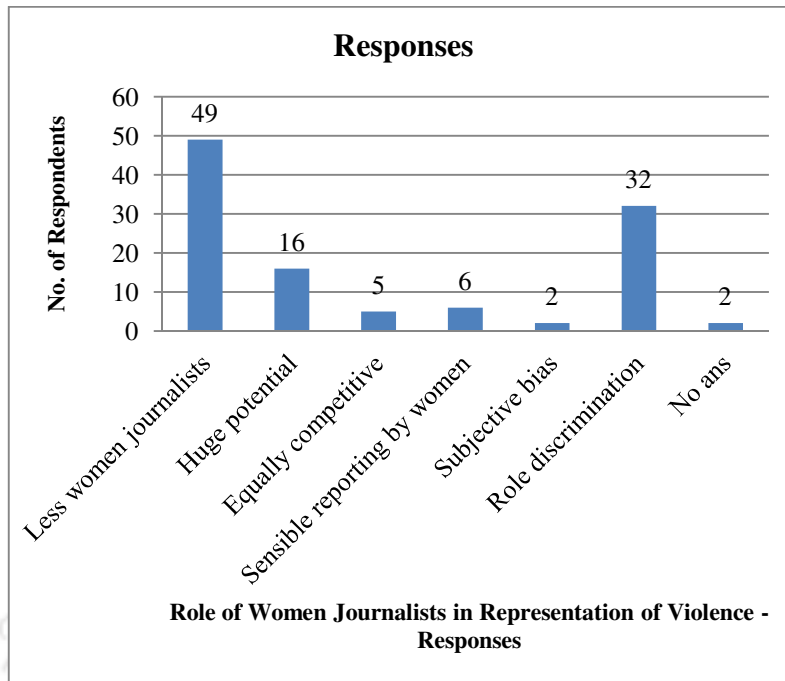


Figure 4.4: Responses on Role of Women Journalists in Representation of Violence

**Less women journalists:** Media broadly is understood to be a domain of men with powerful positions and decision making powers held by them in the industry. 44% respondents (Figure 4.4) were of the view that participation of woman journalists is comparatively lesser than that of men in the region in the industry.

According to Desk editor and Feature writer of an English language Newspaper:

*As in all other spheres of journalism, the percentage of women journalists' vis-à-vis men leaves much to be desired. Women journalists are very few in numbers in that sense, but their scope has not been any less than their male counterparts.*

According to Content Editor of a vernacular language newspaper of Assam:

*There are negligible numbers of female reporters in Assam. And even lesser doing important work, covering significant beats or reporting violence. They are mostly placed in desk jobs or presenters in studios. Reporting for women are either within the boundaries of the city, entertainment, culture or similar considerably less important news beats.*

According to Senior Producer (News) of a regional television channel:

*Violence as a media domain is a sphere of men. One would find negligible or very limited number of women covering 'live' events of violence from Assam. Woman in media in Assam are confined to desk and on-camera jobs. Moreover they are not assigned such crucial coverage of violence on field. And all regional state correspondents of national channels and newspapers are male. Thus the scope and role of women journalists in representation of violence is very restricted and negligible.*

**Huge potential:** 14% respondents (Figure 4.4) pointed at the potential and contributions that woman journalists can offer in the field of journalism in this particular region for the overall uplift. Giving stories beyond facts and figures; looking for human angle stories and not just concentrating on violence; and exploring newer fronts of news is what female journalists are often applauded for in the region, though the number is very few. Moreover if women are at the deciding end of representation it would change the representation pattern of women. To some extent the victimisation of women, the major trend in representation of violence, by the male dominated media industry, would be altered with women journalists taking the lead.

According to News coordinator of a regional news channel:

*They can generate a sense of awareness among the section and have a great role to play to safeguard several issues that are overlooked by their colleagues.*

The respondents also seem to believe that female journalists can contribute towards the progress of women in society and address related issues better than their male counterparts. This would help in breaking stereotypical projections as well as give a wider range of representations to be explored. Reflecting this is the response by news correspondent of a vernacular language newspaper:

*To work for the overall uplift and progress of women and act as their voice against any kind of oppression or violence being meted upon them. They should also represent women in all platforms and walks of life.*

According to Desk Editor of a regional television news channel:

*Women journalists can actually project it better, but Northeast gender biased media houses do not give that independent space to journalists either.*

**Equally Competitive:** 4% respondents (Figure 4.4) were of the opinion that media practitioners are equally competitive irrespective of their gender and have to file stories with similar interest according to situational and organisational demand. Apparently there is not much difference in the representation of violence by men and women journalists. Both give equal coverage to any issue of violence, select and limit information as per prerequisites, exploit it as per requirement and organisation specific editorial rules. The primary concern is the story- the violence incident. As violence sells, every journalism practitioner tries to give their best shot to cover violence in desired manner. But respondents also opined that in regard to sexual

violence, women are more sensitive in their reporting. Otherwise for journalistic gains, both men and women perform equally and represent violence similarly, respondents under this section, opined.

According to Producer (Assamese News) of a regional television news channel:

*Every other person will have different say to the same incident. Being a true journalist we are not suppose report from the perspective of woman or man. Woman should not be different in reporting any event because news is supposed to be real, clear and unbiased, though many say woman journalist would report certain report differently from the man counterpart due to many reasons.*

According to Reporter of a regional television news channel, also a woman herself:

*While reporting on an incident of violence or filing a story, in media today women are equal to men as journalists in field, with similar job responsibilities and job opportunities. The media industry is completely performance based and we have our assignments and deliverables.*

According to Staff reporter of a vernacular language newspaper organisation:

*The journalists may be male or female but both have basic duties according to the field they have chosen and the subject given to them journalist in particular, the beats to cover per se. So his and her role is only to bring out the truth and face consequences for the sake of truth as a journalist. As journalism is known to have a basic structure in context of work and performance, distinction among men and women in journalistic approach is a complex thing not easily comprehensible.*

Echoing similar views Sub-Editor of a regional English language newspaper, a women journalist, cites the little difference in approach and reporting in particular forms of violence especially individual cases of gender related violence where women have proven to be more sensitive in handling issues and representation in media:

*Though I don't think there is much difference in the representation of violence by men and women journalists, both give equal coverage to the issue. Here, the main concern is violence. It is violence that sells so everyone in the industry try to give their best shot to cover violence, represent it as a big news and gain attention. But in regard to sexual violence, women are more sensitive in their reporting, unlike men who in most cases are seen to exploit the incident to make news ignoring ethics, objectivity and confidentiality.*

**Sensible reporting by women:** 5% respondents (Figure 4.4) opined that women are usually more sensible while reporting violence. Apparently women are considered the sensible gender in approach to work, and are expected to present the issues more sensibly following all the ethics and avoiding any content that may further instigate

violence. Respondents also share the view that women related issues and issues involving women in violence situations particular when needs highlight in media, are best handled by female journalists rather than male counterparts.

According to Assistant Producer (English News) of a regional television news channel:

*Women journalist can play a vital role in bringing to light the cases of violence perpetrated against women. Being from the fraternity they can see the issue with more care, concern and sensitivity. Who shall know the plight of violent-hit women than women themselves?*

According to News Coordinator of a regional television news channel:

*Women journalists do feel about violence and related issues very strongly and it is reflected in their reporting style and content. However their involvement and outlook in reporting violence against women comes in very handy in representations as they are able to share their concerns with the viewers/readers on a more personal basis. I have experienced, that women journalists' in reporting violence instances are very judicious and their reporting is not sensationalised.*

According to Production Engineer (News) of a regional television news channel:

*Women may contribute in highlighting certain issues of violence which men might fail to understand. Though participation of women are comparatively lesser in field, female journalists may certainly help in better media representation on certain violence issues.*

According to a female freelance journalist, working in Assam media:

*Women journalists, I believe are more sensitive towards the victim. They are more vocal when the victim is female. Thus there is a possibility that in reporting they tend to be more sensitive towards the issue rather than just using the gender perspective to sell the story.*

**Subjective bias:** 2% of respondents (Figure 4.4) point at the subjective bias that exists while reporting of violence among women journalists. Respondents though very few, were of two different opinions here, while the male journalists believed female journalists get too emotional while dealing with violence content and end up giving a biased view, female journalists showed a preference for women centric media texts in relation to violence.

According to respondent from the vernacular print media of Assam

*Being a woman myself I guess though they are working tirelessly for the cause they tend to become subjective. Subjective bias is decision making or evaluation based on personal, poorly measurable, and unverifiable data or feelings.*

**Role discrimination:** 29% respondents (Figure 4.4) refer to strong role discriminations that prevail in the media industry throughout and the region was no different. The media industry is found having set roles and specific areas of reporting for female journalists. Conflict and violence is often thought to be “serious journalism” and beyond capacity of women journalists. Moreover the editorial positions are held by men which again prohibits women from experimenting and exploring beyond given opportunities.

According to a correspondent of a vernacular language newspaper:

*The role is limited to their assignments. Gender journalism has not happened at least in Assam, mostly limited to desk assignments. There are very few women out reporting.*

According to a correspondent of Assamese news daily:

*Women journalists reporting on violence are very few, even lesser in the region. Though a very significant few are made to look like celebrities, others simply report the sub stories of the lead story.*

It was derived from the responses that as per the popular understanding men are considered as better performers when it comes to reporting violence. Though another view exists that male reporters focus more on the facts, it is their female counterparts who stay on the stories and have detailed contributions (Seethaler, et al.) but in all overcoming the myths that exist in the field of journalism, male dominated image of war correspondent, becomes difficult for the female journalists. It is evident that in most television media reports on violence the presence of the media in location needs to be put across to prove the credibility of the news story. In most instances the field reporting from location are typically by male journalists (see Image 5, 8). The female counterparts are apparently found within the newsrooms and news desks within the office premises (see Image 31). As widely believed female journalists “tell stories about people and not frontlines” (Seethaler et al. 161), an aspect that essentially should guide conflict reporting. But in highly commercialised media industry exploring people and places usually does not fall under the periphery of saleable media content.

Oflate there has been an increase in the number of domestic violence cases being reported in media, especially regional media, from Assam. This still needs to be

confirmed if this trend in media is due to actual change number of cases occurring or due to escalation in reporting of such issues following the popular media trend. But there still remains a gap in reporting on women in conflict and post conflict situation being and related issues being addressed by the media, both local as well as mainstream. A lot also depends upon who has the decision-making power, usually the men. Studies show that a difference can be made when women hold positions of power but women representation in regional media seems to be marginal.

### **4.3 Ethnicity Issues in Reporting of Violence**

Media portrayal may be argued to be the primary source of information for the media consumers in most cases. This leads to the media portrayals widely being understood and accepted as reality for a larger section of consumers, especially for those who have limited or no scope of verification and authentication of facts represented in media. The whole of Northeast is generally perceived as a multi-ethnic society, with various multi-linguistic and multi-religious people and cultures coexisting; with certain conflicting ideologies. Thus media representation of diversity becomes an issue of concern, especially when it comes to representation of various groups divergent on basis of ethnicity.

Representations of ethnic diversity as portrayed in media may be presumed to be operating as power relationships. Ethnicity and conflict are terms associated with media representations of diversity in terms of ethnicity. It may be assumed that inappropriate ethnic representation might affect media consumers' perceptions, behaviour and attitudes fundamentally. But research attempts have been considerably less towards determining the effect and perceptions of misrepresentations towards certain groups, either majority or minority (Greenberg and Brand). Responsible journalism and appropriate representation of violence apparently should not further intolerance among individuals or communities. But contrary to expectations and set standards of reporting of violence, preordained media representations are often seen taking sides, giving verdicts, following similar patterns of content and presentation, and even at times aggravate tensions further.

Here comes the issue of locals and non-locals, native and non-native, indigenous ethnicity, etc. There are also issues of racism and discrimination, common misconception which work behind media representations. “The social movements in Assam led by ethnic Assamese civil society organisations... have raised three important issues- immigration, underdevelopment and making Assam the national province of the Assamese” (Biswas and Thomas 322). There have been instance seen around the world, where ethnic clashes and the news reports have been both a matter of concern and criticism. The basic concern in reporting inter-communal violence is whether or not to reveal the ethnicity of the killers and the victims. (Tekwani 2008: 117). In popular media representations there seem to be only one aggressor at times based on religious identity of the 'victim'. Irrespective of facts and figures media utmost times attempts to colour representations according to popular beliefs and imagination.

#### **4.3.1 Violence Representation: Local versus Non-Local Stereotypes**

There is a strong sense of local and non-local identity, subtly operational behind content and context determination of the representations of violence in the region. The most newsworthy detail in any representation of violence is who the perpetrators of violence are and who are at the receiving end. And it is noteworthy mention that the ideological concepts of the media makers- the decision makers and field practitioners, distinctively work behind the media content, deciding and projecting groups involved in violence in certain manner. In most media representations of violence the media intension has been found to be to identify the perpetrators of violence and categorise the victims. Media in reporting violence in Assam is often seen talking very distinctive roles in deciding and projecting accordingly who are to be held responsible and who are to be sympathised with among the groups involved in the conflict. It is further noticed that at times a certain kind of bias or stereotype in projection is apparent regarding violence distinguishing people on the basis of ethnicity, race, religion, etc. and determining their way of projection.

In an attempt to understand the media representation with ethnicity issues deciding the representation patterns, query put to the media practitioners' were on existence of any kind of bias or stereotypes in projection of violence and related or involved groups, if

at all. The respondents were found to be focusing on violence in context of natives and non-natives, like violence on Assamese in Assam and violence on other ethnic groups in Assam and similar cases. It was found that distinctions are made into victims and executors of violence. The respondents were further seen to be taking sides, supporting either of the groups or individuals as per segregations, and thus their own understandings, perceptions and prejudices were found to be well reflected in their media products as well. As J. D Lorenz wrote in his Chicago Tribune article titled “An insider’s view of Jerry Brown”, “newsworthiness means featuring disagreement, conflict and contrast. It means painting campaign participants as heroes and villains...It means tailoring one’s speech to the needs of the moment and capturing the audience’s fancy” (Johnson-Cartee 127). In similar terms going by newsworthiness reporting on violence requires creating conflicting ideologies and conflicting groups so as to present news as desired.

The responses (Figure 4.5) on Violence Representation: Local Versus Non-Local Stereotypes may be categorised as below:

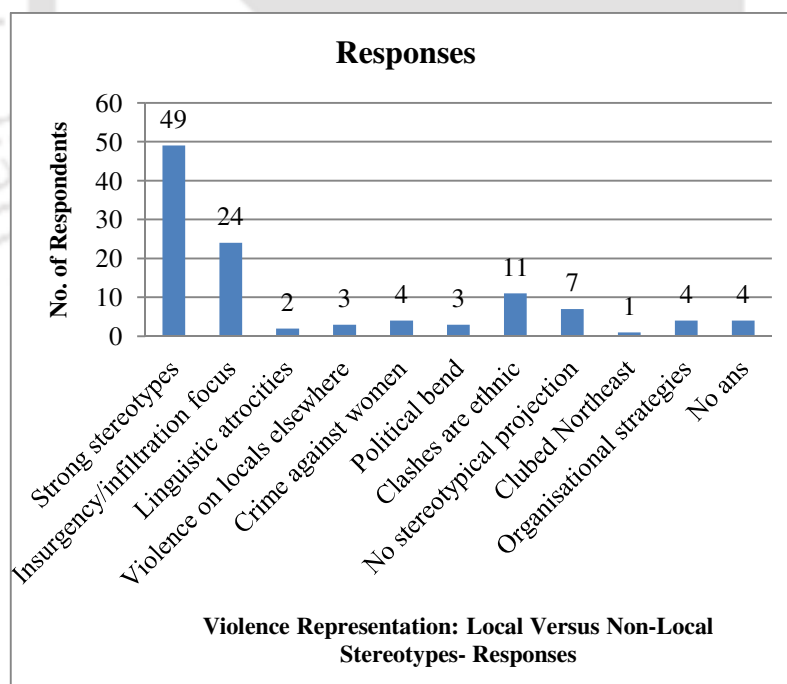


Figure 4.5: Responses on Violence Representation: Local Versus Non-Local Stereotypes

**Strong stereotypes:** 44% of respondents (Figure 4.5) refer to the strong stereotypical perceptions which work behind the definitive kind of representation pattern of violence. There is a strong sense of local and non-local identities found to be subtly

working on content and context of the representations of violence. Though the definition of local-nonlocal and indigenous Assamese is not clear, neither theoretically nor literally, still according to respondents the damage to the Assamese is highlighted in media in any given situation in comparison to other communities-linguistically, culturally or ethnically. Selective responses echoing similar views are presented below:

According to Copy Editor of an English language newspaper published from Guwahati:

*There is biased and stereotyped projection in media always. The community which is linguistically and culturally the majority receive undue, unnecessary and biased projection and are projected in positive light; even if the case is otherwise.*

According to Producer (Assamese News) of a regional television news channel:

*As already said in the earlier points the entire media houses in the region has some kind of affinity towards a certain group, institutions or parties in reporting a event. Despite many channels trying to give free and fair report one time or the other they are influenced by them. The influences of the state are also seen in certain cases where they would like to hide certain information for the sake of the ruling party. For instance the reports that we saw in the immigrants issue in the last Kokrajhar violence till now it is not clear. What is the actual report on this issue the government has not been able to become clear or they do not want to be clear. Now, in this kind of situation if the media wants a true story with solid proof it is very much possible. But the entire media is tied up.*

According to Producer of a regional television news channel:

*Assamese community actually consists of many ethnic groups and general people of peace makers are portrayed as responsible citizen working to bridge the gap between the concerned groups. They are presented as independent, rational and courageous. However, there is difference while reporting incidents of Assamese people and ethnic groups. Ethnic groups/ areas dominated by ethnic groups are projected as under-developed, conventional etc.*

According to Desk Editor of a regional television news channel:

*There is an inherent bias that leads to such violences against a particular community. For example people from the Bihari community were targeted few years ago in an act of revenge.*

According to Desk Editor and Feature writer of a regional English language newspaper:

*Any bias or stereotype is socio-political in nature. Northeast as such is projected in national media as a region suffering from much strife. Besides, many national media houses have vested interest in either defending the ruling state government's action or otherwise.*

According to CEO and Content Editor of a regional television news channel:

*I would not say that there is a bias coverage. But I would like to stress on the fact that when such issues are debated in television shows in regional channel. Sometimes, we see eminent experts speak in favour of Assamese people. This is mainly because sometimes we are carried by our emotions, when our community is being attacked. It should not be the case as this is against the very aspect of journalistic ethos and principles.*

According to Freelance journalist and Editor of a current affairs magazine:

*Certain media platforms tilt ethnic violence towards their chauvinistic preoccupations or commercial considerations. For example during violence against Hindi speaking people, sometimes that is projected as justified citing exploitation of 'outsiders'. During violence against religious minorities, they play cards almost the way political parties do.*

**Insurgency/infiltration focus:** 21% respondents (Figure 4.5) referred to the insurgency or infiltration focus of media in connection to the local and non-local identity constructions of the media. Respondents seemed to relate the two concepts in media representations generalising insurgency in the present day context as the anti-foreigner agitation in most cases. Every incident of violence in the region is apparently projected as terrorism or insurgency related by the mainstream media directly, whereas the regional media looks for infiltration links to the violence occurred. Mostly the ethnic and communal violence incidents have a strong mention of the illegal migrants from neighbouring country, Bangladesh. Though violence against alleged illegal migrants are given media space and time, at times the local media even tries to support the non-migrant counterparts of the violence; and in the process also flares up violence further. The incident of violence though is covered as figures and facts in relation to similar incidents in the past, very little is the media reports found to be analytical and detailed with research and groundwork about the causes and background.

According to Correspondent (Assam) of a national newspaper with Guwahati edition:

*Due to the long lasting problem of influx and illegal settlers, in many cases news makers try to segregate the population from each other. While the indigenous people are often the local and legal the infiltrators are the illegal non-locals in the eyes of media. However, it's not always easy and not acceptable as well.*

According to Senior Producer Cum Desk Editor of a regional television news channel:

*Any insurgency related news of ULFA mostly is always pitched against Bangladeshi infiltrators. Insurgency and infiltration both are burning issues of Assam and media.*

**Linguistic atrocities:** 2% respondents specifically point at linguistic atrocities that are given priority in media.

According to Freelance journalist reporting Assam for national mainstream media:

*The attack on Hindi speaking are also given a high priority especially in national media. The projection is different in case of local and national media. While the regional media is somewhat seen to be justifying the fact, the national mainstream media often extensively flashes the news in confirmation to the unliveable conditions of the state.*

**Violence on locals elsewhere:** 3% (Figure 4.5) mentioned about the strong local identity that works behind media representations while dealing with any incidence of violence of anywhere else where the victim happens to be a person with regional origin. Apparently for some respondents there is a strong bias against the northeastern people in general that works in media representations pertaining to issues of discrimination and racism. Thus violence on locals outside the region is given a priority in regional media suggested respondents. Apparently there have been reported instances of misrepresentation in media, spreading rumours or not being able to represent the complete stories which lead to the media text being misunderstood by the media consumers especially in case of violence. News on racial, ethnic or communal violence on local people elsewhere often gets huge media coverage in regional media. Media is seen reporting on such cases not as a report of an incident alone but often portrays the outer world a dangerous place to reside leading to drastic repercussions from the consumer section.

According to Freelance Photojournalist and Independent Film Maker:

*Any kind of unsafe environment for the northeastern people staying in other regions of the country are flared out of proportions in local media channels, without even verifying facts and not even imagining the impact it can have on the people. For example the Northeast exodus recent past, most of the action happened because of wrong media interpretation of events.*

According to Copy editor of a vernacular language newspaper organisation of Assam:

*There have been numerous incidents of northeastern boys and girls attacked, killed, molested in Delhi. It raises serious safety issues and thus becomes an important news story where our boys and girls face violence in a far away state.*

**Crimes against women:** 4% of respondents (Figure 4.5) opined that crime against northeastern girls as a whole is stereotypically presented. Media in a way apparently emphasises on the identity of the victim in case of her northeast connections while perceiving that violence at individualistic level occurs due to prejudices.

**Political bend:** 3% respondents (Figure 4.5) refer that everything connected to politics, political links are forced into the violence depiction. Media apparently accepts all reports when provided a political angle.

**Clashes are ethnic:** 10% respondents (Figure 4.5) opined that representation of violence mainly deals with all violence occurring in the region blindly being connected to different ideologies, cultures, ethnicity etc. Apparently the perception among media makers exists which has even percolated into the mainstream public consciousness as well that all violence happening in the entire region are ethnic, so much so that media consumers have even been desensitised on the issue.

**No stereotypical projection:** 6% of respondents (Figure 4.5) refused to have executed or witnessed much of a difference in projection or construction of local as well a non-local stereotypes in media representations in respect to violence.

According to Sub-editor of a regional English language newspaper organisation:

*Violence in any form on any ethnic groups is equally highlighted provided they fall under the general term "Assamese" be it Bodos, Misings, or Koch Rabhas, who fall under the larger fold of the term Assamese.*

According to News-Coordinator of a regional television news channel:

*News is news and violence is violence. There is no bias when it comes to violence. For example: when the BTAD violence broke out, all the media houses in Assam focussed on every issue from failure of law and order to the failure of the administrative machinery. We also highlighted about the condition in which thousands of Bodos and alleged Bangladeshi's living in camps. Had we been biased (which we should have been for Bodo's are Assamese citizens while Bangladeshis are not) we would have not covered every aspect of the incident.*

According to Correspondent of a regional English language newspaper:

*Assam has a long history of aggression and since it shares its borders with a number of countries and states it has issues which are unique to the region. However such demographic situations or the socio economic root which has resulted in the upsurge of rebels are often ignored. Most news related to violence are reported in as isolated pieces with little or no reference to its causes or very little information on side stories. Coverage of human interest stories or feature stories from this region are far and few.*

According to Senior Reporter of a regional television news channel:

*While projecting such violence most of media houses never become biased unless and until they are controlled by the Political parties.*

According to Producer (News and Current affairs) of DD News, Regional News Unit:

*It is the gravity and situation of the violent event represented in media in such a way that these news when broadcast will not ignite other communities or hurt anyone in particular. So in this part also the basic norms of journalism showing the bright side of the newly born media. But the issues and the demands or the need of local peoples are given first preferences than to the subject related to the national issues. And politics is playing the vital role so that one can represent the facts from the political point of view. It should be represented from the journalist's point of view.*

**Clubbed Northeast:** 1% of respondent (Figure 4.5) points at the clubbed identity crisis entire Northeast suffers from. Region is seen as violence whole with no such segregation by mainstream media. Whole of the region is presented in a different light: Most of the time it is seen that in such cases there is a biasness since it is represented as something related to Northeast India. The mainstream media today to some extent have stereotyped all the states in this region. Any individual from any particular state from the region is stereotyped as Northeastern rather than his/her own particular state. Thus media has been propagating a strong sense of the local Northeastern people and the non-local mainstream along but also at the same time is depriving individuals of individualistic identity.

**Organisational strategies:** 4% respondents (Figure 4.5) point at various media organizations following different patterns of projection of violence depending upon various influencing factors. As ideologies vary from media house to house even at

very regional level, constructed ideologies also differ depending upon their target audience and reach. Strategies of reporting on violence differ for local regional to nation media houses in content also depending upon language, circulation and spread. According to Senior Copy Editor of a regional newspaper:

*Journalists generally have to file stories as dictated by the editor or the management board of the media house concerned. No, full freedom is never guaranteed to the reporters filing the story or the editor editing that piece of news.*

The media functioning has been such that the trend is of portraying the 'other' communities as negative in the region. But the concept of the 'other' seems to be ambiguous. It may be migrated Bangladesh residents, Hindi speaking population settled in Assam or any non-Assamese community per se, but this definition itself of 'others' is unclear, not only by the people of the region but also of the media houses. Thus with the mixed and ambiguous concept of outsiders the projection in media of outsiders is a bit confusing and often in negative light. While most of the local media houses focus on outsiders negatively, it is observed the national channels portray violence on non-Assamese outsiders very vastly. The illegal Bangladeshi immigrants issue is given wide coverage in local as well as national media but is seen varying in stand points. And moreover any kind of mass violence is mostly given ethnic bend with communities clashing for statehood demand, identity crisis etc, bracketed under religious clashes by media. Here raises the question of credibility of media reports as media mostly engages in passing judgmental reports and following popular perception patterns in giving angles to stories of violence.

The mainstream media is more than often seen pronouncing clashes in certain pockets of the state as the entire state being riot hit. There are even instances when a regional violence is declared affecting all the seven northeastern states. The regional media is apparently more into taking political stances and giving verdicts and opinions rather than objective and fair reporting of incidents. Media in both the cases, with prime focus on violence- riots, armed clashes, killings and mass displacement, depressing human angle stories etc. is found to play up information to construct reality keeping intune with existing media trends and expected consumer demands. Media representations of violence in respect to drawing conclusions and taking sides of involved individuals and groups in conflict situations, is seen to be more in

correspondence with the concept of war journalism. As opposed to peace journalism, war journalism in representing facts and figures to the consumers is more of a propaganda representation with often innate agenda in mind (Khan and Shakir 2011). Similarly as derived from responses in reporting facts and figures of violence instances in Assam, the media houses seem to be following propaganda-oriented journalism subtly. While some media practitioners and media houses display strong resentment for the perceived non-natives (allegedly Bangladeshi migrants in most cases) and condemn their actions and violent retaliation, believing and projecting them to be the root cause of conflict in the region. A section of media (as per respondents) on the contrary is seen evading strong condemnation of violent acts against non-natives or exploring the root cause of the conflict, and rather reporting the incident of violence reflecting strong stereotypes. This individual and organisational ideology is reflected in the media products, resulting in a preconceived manner of projection of violence, strengthening the concept of the social enmity and intolerance. On a similar note and as a case in point, on examining the media representations of the Bodo-Muslims conflict of July 2012, media is apparently alleged for representing the story with “communal overtones” and “terming the ethnic clash as another form of Gujarat riots” (Mochahari) without proper research and contextual understanding. It may conclusively stated that similar stereotypical patterns of representing conflicts from the region, with preconceived notions, terming every conflict as ethnic cleansing and giving it a large scale impact picture has become a repeatedly media affair.

In such a context apart from the regional media houses producing similar stories with patterned representation, the mainstream media is also found to be practicing similar selection, packaging and representation prototype for covering the region. Apparently the regional media houses, local correspondences and freelance journalists located in the region provide news and packaged news stories to the mainstream media houses (media collaboration section). There are very few instances where reporters from the national media houses are assigned coverage duties in the region. This primarily is the reason why regional news reports with given news angles are reflected in the mainstream media. On the contrary if other journalists from other parts of the world at all venture into the region for any particular assignments, to find news stories and document instances, they land up with already a given set agenda. The question

remains, of all the violence and conflict that happens in the state and of whatever is reported in media how much the true picture is and how much is a predesigned story published with local names and experience only.

Moreover the present practice of representations may also be attributed to the strong political influence in media products. Apparently the propagation of violence through regional media that reaches the world is due to the political involvement, interference and control over media. It may be argued that while the enduring branded communal clashes often with ethnic and religious conviction is expected to benefit into vote banks; maintaining the conflict prone disturbing image of the state with violence affecting huge population results in huge central funds. Also other than discovering newer prospects of news and identifying gaps of news selection and representation, introspecting and improving media content and representation, media is again criticized of reflecting the popular perspectives. This certainly has led to the realisation that media has been overlooking “the larger issues such as change in demographic equation, unabated flow of immigrants from Bangladesh, land alienation, abdication of state’s responsibility, involvement of the non-state actors, etc” in its representations (Mochahari).

As derived from the responses, the regional as well as mainstream media in selectively reporting violence from the region with identical representation patterns, is in accordance to the popular perceptions, the political and ideological bent of the media houses or individual practitioners. The prevalent practice of media representation of war and conflicts may be well understood in terms of the 'propaganda model' (Herman and Chomsky) of the media. Likewise the commercialised media industry reflects only the “elite perspectives” and thrives to identify and mirror the popular assumptions (xxxiii).

#### **4.4 Ethnicity and Separatism in Reporting Violence**

The primary cause of contention in parts of the Northeast and in Assam particularly, may be said to have its genesis mainly in two prominent issues- the diverse separatist movements and ethnicity issues.

#### 4.4.1 Sub-nationalism/ Separatism in Northeast: Responses

The respondents' personal and organisational views on sub-nationalism/ separatism reflect upon what goes behind the representation of the issues on their respective media products. A larger section of the media practitioners who were interviewed showed support towards the policy of asserting the interest of one's own state/region/province which may be separate from the common interest of the entire nation.

Just because they themselves (media makers) are supporting the idea of subnationalism, their own understanding and support gets reflected in their works and selection of subjects and representation manner. Thus violence related to, or violence which has subnationalism or separatist movements' undercurrent, find place in media products. And also they are projected and even flared out of proportions at times in support of the ideology. Violence is glorified and representation escalated to put forward views rather than representation of mere facts and figures; often justifying violence and therefore justifying the biased representation process in media. Assam is one of the four northeastern states which have been severely affected by separatist movements along with Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland (Baruah 1999).

The responses (Figure 4.6) on Sub-nationalism/ Separatism in Northeast may be categorised as below:

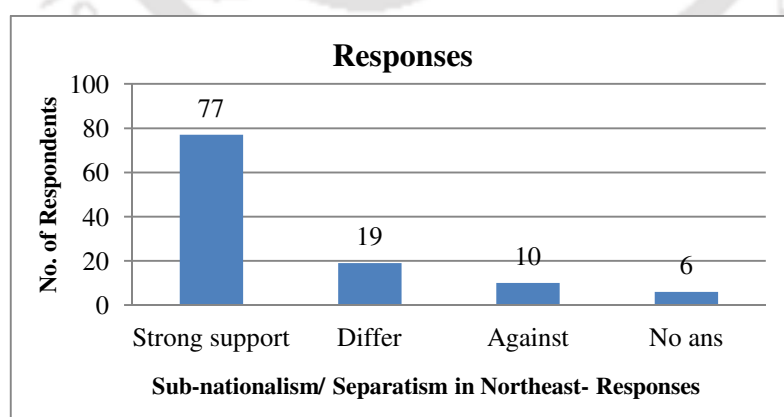


Figure 4.6: Responses on Sub-nationalism/ Separatism in Northeast

**Strong support:** 69% respondents (Figure 4.6) seem to identify with ideologies supporting sub-nationalism/ separatism in Assam and entire Northeast. Respondents

seem to view the ideological bend towards subnationalism, the related ethnic rebellion and cultural conflicts in the state and extended region, as means of overcoming the perceived social and political deprivation of the state and its people. And this perception and support of the media makers towards the movement is strongly reflected in their works as well. The content and context of media products, mostly news covering incidents related to such movements hence reflect the archetypical representation pattern of information to the outside world. Some specific responses which reflect strong support towards the separatist ideology are given below:

According to Sub-Editor of an English newspaper organisation:

*North East region has many ethnic tribes who feel deprived of their rights with settlement of outsiders and growing up of various establishments. They want to maintain their identity and integrity which seems to be threatened by invasion of outsiders. They resort to seek separate District/ State to maintain their existence.*

According to Production Engineer (News) of a regional television news channel:

*It is generally assumed that the central policy makers have biasness towards Northeast. There is a prevalence of the idea of “mainstream India”, where the Northeastern states are seldom considered as a part of it.*

According to Senior Copy Editor of a vernacular (Assamese) language newspaper:

*Since Independence, Northeast residents have been feeling left out of the development policies and programmes being implemented in the rest of India. Some areas of this region also allege that they are not a part of India. Most of the mainstream media had joined the regional vernacular in subjective reporting based on the media house’s political backings or leanings.*

According to a News Producer at a regional television news channel and media faculty:

*Separatism is not the solution to the region. We cannot divide every community to form a different state. The main solution is development of the region where the people do not feel ignored and rejected. But initially when such group started like NSCN, they started with good reasons. But today if we look around there is only killing, looting, kidnappings etc. which was not part of their actual goal.*

According to Sub-editor of a language (Assamese) newspaper of Assam:

*It has grown because of the plight of people, many become victims of influential goons without understanding what the issue is and Northeast is one region where it’s easy to play to people’s sentiments.*

According to English Desk editor/News anchor who is also a media research scholar:

*It is more of political creation and the people's tendency to assert their own cultural and regional identity and break away from the "Unity in Diversity" concept to "Diversity in Unity" concept. Historical events of the region is to taken into account while deliberation on the subject of sub-nationalism/ separatism in Northeast.*

According to City Reporter at an English language newspaper who is also a media Faculty at a media institute in Guwahati:

*Separatism is actually a state of mind while misrepresentation is real. Sub nationalism is an offshoot of the feeling of alienation which often stems out from subjective views that are often present in the society.*

According to a freelance journalist contributing for vernacular language newspapers:

*Separatism or Sub- nationalism, according to me is the principle or attitude or norm or activism which separates a state of cultural, religious, racial, ethnic and tribals from the larger group. It is the policy of asserting the interest of one's own state/region/province, as separate from the interest of the nation and the common interest of all other states/regions/provinces.*

According to Freelance journalist (reporting in Vernacular language media) and Editor of a current affairs magazine:

*There are historical, political, economic, geographic reasons behind such sub-nationalism/ separatism. Media has played a crucial role in it. Sometimes media platforms have been used by intelligentsia or separatist organisation or the media itself for fuelling and assembling sentiments.*

**Differ:** 17% respondents (Figure 4.6) feel that situations, ideological support and representation patterns, have been changing in media towards ideologies such as sub-nationalism or separatism.

According to Senior Correspondent of a National Newspaper with Guwahati edition, covering all seven northeastern states:

*Northeast is slow in various political and economical grounds due to less attention from Delhi. However, things are changing in recent time. Though the sense of anguish is relevant but separatism is vague in present day context.*

According to Anchor and Desk Editor (English and Assamese) of a regional news channel:

*Personally speaking, the socio-economic conditions of the Northeast leave much to be desired as far as co-operation and commitment from the Centre is concerned. Historically, Northeast*

*was never a part of the Indian mainland – and the huge number of communities and tribes in this part of the nation would naturally have led to the strife that prevails currently. While it is important for the Northeast to be strategically aligned with India in defence against the powers that be (read: China), at the same time it is also important for each and every community to have their individuality and rights. While separatism is not the answer, there needs to be equal representation from these communities at the socio-economic levels of the working government.*

According to News coordinator of a regional news channel:

*Sub-nationalism/ separatism in Northeast have been an integral part of Northeast. Maybe people of this region think that they have been neglected by the centre for a long period of time. However, things are changing now with many of these separatists have either joined the mainstream or are thinking about it.*

**Against:** 9% respondents' (Figure 4.6) opinion was apparently not supportive in regard to the ideology revolving around separatism or sub-nationalism. Moreover, they reflected views against sub-nationalism/ separatism. It is noteworthy that most of the respondents opining against the movement and voicing their dissatisfaction belonged to the category of freelance journalists, without organisational affiliation and thus without the mandate to follow the organisational ideologies as they are not associated with any particular media house. These media practitioners seem to have limited or no organisational pressure influencing their thoughts and work.

According to Freelance correspondent of an English language newspaper of Assam:

*Sub-nationalism is an evil concept woven by anti-national elements with help from certain neighbouring counties in order to break the unity and harmony in India.*

According to Reporter of a regional television news channel:

*Most of the terrorist organisations in Northeastern region are demanding autonomy. Such status can never be given to this region as now days this part of the country is getting equal importance as other states.*

According to content editor (English news) of a regional television news channel:

*I don't subscribe to such ideas, so it is best not to be discussed. Sometimes discussions give teeth to an idea of separatism or alienation or that we are identically different, etc.*

A respondent, producer at DD News Northeast, seems to have a very different take on the concept. Along with holding media responsible for spreading notions, he even cites westernisation as a prime factor for such stereotypical perception creation:

*My ideas about separatism, is negligence by the community amongst themselves. The ideologies of foreign western countries have been imposed upon psychologically in such a way, that the simple indigenous people of the region misinterpret their version respectively. Everyone wants freedom, but for what is unclear. What will be their economic sources, how they will run themselves, it is not fuelled by the persons who are spreading the ideology. So it is proper miscalculation of the balance of a citizenship in inferiority and superiority. The basic word freedom has been spread in such a way that other things related to life are forgotten. So media should highlight the other things more that the misconceptualised freedom.*

A respondent from vernacular media states:

*The Assamese media has always given undue attention to people who have been associated with terrorist organisations at one point of time. They are treated as national heroes... whereas their attitude has always been against the sovereignty of this country.*

Notably most respondents who showed strong support towards the cause were affiliated with vernacular language media, whereas those who could sense a change or felt the need for change mainly had associations with the national media. Comparatively lesser in number were the section of respondents who reflected strong views against sub-nationalism and separatism and incidentally all were professionally associated with one or the other English language media houses or were freelance correspondents for national media houses.

It was also observed that acceptance and direct picking up of stories happen more from the English language media outlets in contrast to the vernacular language media houses where from if a story in case picked requires to be sent only after modifications and translations in case of print especially as visuals from television channels irrespective of the language have chances of making it to the mainstream media. Thus the possibility of the mainstream media picking up a story with a slight negative angle regarding the issue is more likely to be taken up by the mainstream media house that a story from a different perspective which might in turn try and define the concept and the agitations in a supportive tone. Making the mainstream media scenario unable to explain the situation and also constructing partial reality for the media consumers. These media representations further the distorted perceptions of the media consumers of the mainstream media.

Political affiliations of media houses and journalists have had strong influence on representation of political matters with specific focus on Assam movement and violence. As Monirul Hussain points at dissimilarity of focus in representation of the separatist movements in media depending upon individual or organisational ideological beliefs (1994), similar discrepancies are even found in today's context in media representation of sub-national/ separatist movements in Assam. Referring to the Assam movement and its representation in media, Hussain affirms while one section of mainstream media with right-wing party affiliation was seen glorifying the demands of the movement, another section with more of a secular outlook was seen emphasising on the nexus between the leadership of the movement and the political party in power (124). Reporting of violence in Assam has always been in connection to various political movements at various levels. Apparently most media representations try and draw parallels between the violence incidents and the politics associated with mere representation of facts and figures of damage and casualties. Unquestionably Assam has been through a phase of violence and victims, and such violence "have drawn more media coverage than many peaceful mass mobilization programs" (Hussain 1994: 145). Looking at the ownership pattern of the media houses in Assam makes it clear that some are either directly owned by politicians or former extremist members, and there are ample indirect linkages from finances to administrative control. Thus strong ideological inclination is inevitable in most representations and media functionalities.

In representing only the facts and figures of the violence occurring in the region, and representing a depressing reality to the world through media, the media fails to address certain specific questions like- *Why is everybody agitating in the North East? Why are the insurgent outfits, student organisations, or ethnic groups clamouring for more and more concessions from the government? Why are sub-national aspirations so intense in the region?* (Hussain and Routray). These conflicts which "seem to have become almost part of normal life" often escape the mainstream media attention (Baruah 1999: xi). Moreover the media in dealing with violence representation in a patterned manner apparently has even failed to appropriately address other issue of the region which includes identification of actual causes of the conflict, peace

initiatives, opportunities, developmental scopes, tourism prospects, available resources like tea, oil, forest etc. and many others.

#### **4.5 Peace process and Peacemakers**

Reporting violence in media may be analysed on two lines, one with focus on conflict- war journalism and another solution oriented with focus on peace initiatives-peace journalism, models proposed by Johan Galtung. Reflecting similar views is Wolfsfeld (2004) as he looks into the possibilities of media promoting peacemaking by emphasising on the role of individuals and groups working towards peace making in a conflict ridden state.

In relation to media representations of peace processes, echoing experts and studies, Wolfsfeld states that “when things get bad, the news media often make them worse” (Wolfsfeld 30). Media apparently focuses more on the negatives, severities, controversies and elites associated with the process rather than the peace process itself. As again Wolfsfeld points out the inevitable, the consequence of selective news content and angle is “to escalate a conflict than to pacify it” (19).

Journalists in pursuit of “drama and conflict” seek the “most extreme voices and actions for the purpose of exciting audiences” (Wolfsfeld 19) and in the process end up representing and publicising the world as a more hostile and unliveable place through news, frightening audiences. Going by the “cultivation theory” media consumers exposed to violence hold the chance of believing violence as the only existing social reality. Media in extensively portraying violence from the region has created strong perceptions among audiences far and wide about no positive things occurring in the region other than violence. Moreover as Assam not only has a strong history of conflict and violence incidents, but also has stronger perceptions and prejudices of being violence prone, more strengthened by media representations; it apparently becomes more important to deal with the tempered perception and projection of the region. Mainstream media along with local media support is often seen focusing only on episodes of mass violence rather than reflecting upon justice and peace building.

#### **4.5.1 Peace Makers' Media Projection**

Peace journalism, as proposed by Johan Galtung is not a part of followed representation practice in media regarding Assam. Apparently highly commercialised media is on the constant lookout for violence in media reports so as to attract attention of viewers and achieve desired outcome. In doing so, the media reporting of violence in Assam is apparently found lacking in exploring and exposing the real causes of violence, causes of escalation and follow up on improving situations or efforts towards peacemaking. Indepth reporting of conflict and violence calls for indepth understanding by media and proper representation of peace making processes towards reconciliation.

Media failure to “explore peace proposals and offer images of peaceful outcomes” lead to failure to “expose the cause of escalation and the impact of media coverage itself” (Steuter and Wills 207). In similar lines unless “news about attempts to resolve conflicts” are given out, there persists “an oppressive sense of fatalism” which is further reinforced, if ‘people have no images or information about possible peaceful outcomes and the promise of healing to balance the fatalism further violence may be engendered” (Steuter and Wills 207).

Drawing parallel lines between representation of violence and representation of peace possibilities, the role of media may be defined to be of utmost importance in curbing future possibilities of conflict and violence with appropriate representation. As experts believe omitting efforts towards reconciliations and peacemaking in media representations of violence may further lead to re-emergence of violence and deteriorate the existing state of the society.

To analyse the media scenario in Assam and the role of media in representing violence in situations of violence and conflict, it becomes necessary to study the representation of peace making attempts in media. In an attempt to do the same respondents from the media fraternity were enquired about individual and organisational understanding of representation of individuals associated with peacemaking in the conflict related state of affairs. The responses were broadly on projection of peacemakers in media, very limited identifiable personalities.

As per respondents peace process in Assam has few prominent persistent names associated with it. Referring to peacemaking in Assam all respondents unanimously were found to be referring to negotiations and peace talks with the ULFA with no or negligible mention of other groups and members. Apparently the stalwarts of the peacemaking attempt were selectively named as noted author Dr. Indira Goswami and prominent public intellectual Dr. Hiren Gohain.

The responses (Figure 4.7) on Peace Makers' Media Projection may be categorised as below:

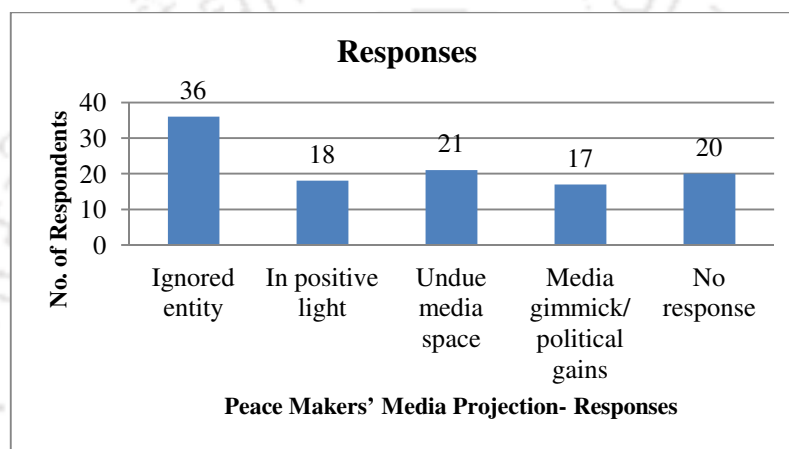


Figure 4.7: Responses on Peace Makers' Media Projection

**Ignored entity:** 32% respondents (Figure 4.7) opine that the peace makers and the attempt towards peacemaking in the region through them has been an entirely ignored area of media representations. With rare attention from mainstream media along with the regional media, projection of Assam with efforts towards peace making has been an unknown facet of reality for the outside world. The region is mostly known through violence incidents only through media.

According to Editor of a vernacular language newspaper of Assam:

*Media has never brought to the fore the peace making process and the peace makers. This may be mostly because they strongly believe and follow that highlight on peace initiatives would lighten the tense situations and thus not 'sell' the content in media.*

According to Production Engineer of a regional news channel:

*The efforts of the peacemakers in the peace making process is rarely shown, such individuals are only characterised and honoured in their field of specialties but very few things regarding their effort in peace making is told. If only media reports were to be relied source of*

*information, many would not even know that Assam had ever initiated negotiations or talks with any group, if there at all is any initiation towards peace.*

According to Sub-editor of a vernacular language newspaper organisation

*Mamoni Goswami hardly got any acknowledgement or appreciation when she was interlocutor of talks between ULFA and the government. Peace makers are not discussed or not given that recognition which if done, would create a positive feel in times of conflict.*

**In Positive light:** 16% respondents (Figure 4.7) opine that peacemakers, as mediators between the Government and the extremist groups, have been projected by media mostly in positive light, representing optimistic, constructive news reports. It is worth mention here that most of the respondents who were of the opinion of peacemaking attempts and peace makers being projected in positive light in media were found to have regional language media house affiliations.

According to Freelance journalist of Assam:

*Peace makers are projected in a very positive light in media as they are being seen as the harbingers of peace between the fighting rebels/extremists and the government through dialogue in order to reach an amicable solution and understanding between the two parties.*

According to Senior Copy Editor of a regional newspaper organisation:

*Peacemakers, like Mamoni, are generally reported in respectful (subjective) tone by the local media and objectively by the national media. Media has probably well projected them and they are even well received by the people.*

According to Producer (News) of a regional television channel:

*Peace makers are portrayed as responsible citizen working to bridge the gap between the concerned groups. They are presented as independent, rational and courageous.*

According to Correspondent of a national English language newspaper's Guwahati edition:

*They always are projected as a path maker. Media while can only supply information, always try to display such peace makers role to the maximum for greater interest.*

According to News coordinator of a regional television news channel:

*Mamoni Raisom Goswami was a crucial member of the PCG constituted by the once united ULFA. Her clout and her judgment is adored by every Assamese individual. She for long had been a part of the dialogue between the ULFA and the centre and on most occasions the ULFA thought her to be right person to pass on messages on their behalf. When Mamoni Raisom*

*Goswami talks about the ULFA crisis/talks etc., the media take it very seriously because what she says is of great importance for the people of Assam.*

**Undue media space:** There is a section of respondents who believe as violence is a bit too glorified in media peace makers are also equally glorified by media rather than actually projecting the real efforts towards peace making. 19% of respondents (Figure 4.7) believe that the peace making process with individual names or groups associated with it are more of a calculated political move and not a way of essentially addressing the issue. The subtle deliberation of the respondents referred to disappointment, because of the strong political and institutional influence on media representations, irrespective of public opinion.

According to Sub-editor of a regional English language newspaper:

*They are covered more than the issue itself. In fact, the issue gains mileage only when a reputed peace maker is involved. Any ordinary man fighting for a cause will definitely not be able to highlight an issue as it is when a famous personality takes up the cause.*

According to Producer (English News) of a regional television news channel:

*The peace-makers are almost given celebrity status. But they are also presented as intellectuals who for most of the time are too soft to actually bring about any change.*

According to reporter of a regional English language newspaper organisation:

*Peace makers are given a larger than life image and regular people find little projection as peace makers.*

According to News Producer of DD News, Guwahati:

*Peace makers get importance in media only if they are a prominent personality. She is portrayed in a glorified image whose efforts were appreciated. But was she not a bit too glorified than what she actually did and deserved? May be because violence is glorified related issues also get hyped coverage in media.*

It is noteworthy that all the respondents who opined about peacemakers' projection in media is giving them undue coverage and a much hyped facet of representation, giving too much coverage in media, had associations with the national media houses and not regional vernacular houses. This confirms the basic difference in dealing with peace making process and media representation of the same in the backdrop of violence in the local media houses and the national media. The root cause may be seen as the target audience and the sentiments that are being addressed through the

representations. As a large section of population in Assam to a large extent seem to romanticise the extremist leaders or had history of supporting the cause of the outfit, thus attempts being made at bringing the members of those outfits into mainstream media is very well accepted by the local media consumers. Thus representations are such. But while addressing a larger group of media consumers, the mainstream media houses or the media houses with nationwide and beyond reach, the media makers seem to have different sentiments to address thus sympathising with the extremist groups, their member or attempts at bringing them to mainstream is never their (mainstream media houses) concern. And this may be seen as primary reason why the peace makers of the region do not get prominence in the mainstream media representations as a reflection of media decision makers' perceptions and understanding and dissimilarity in target audiences.

**Media gimmick or political gains:** 15% respondents (Figure 4.7) opine all reports on prospective attempts towards peacemaking and representation of peacemakers in media, to be media gimmick for political gains or gains of some other sort. Respondents apparently feel that the peace talks and related individuals facilitating the peace process only are meant for a particular cluster of the society. While all the peacemaking efforts at times do fodder for media attention, it caters to the needs of only the upper strata or is directed towards political gains of some sort. Thus for some media makers the pressure to represent events relating to peace reinstallations in the state and peacemakers in certain glorified manner only subtly intensifies the violence gradually blowing up the situation and aggravating violence.

According to CEO & Content Editor of regional news channel (multilingual):

*News broadcast has become very challenging. In the race to who breaks the story first and fast, we often make over emphasis on issues related to militancy. And peace makers like Mamoni Raisom Goswami, etc have been given importance as they held very high position in the society for their contribution to this region. People like Mamoni has played vital role in peace negotiation with ULFA and her role has been commendable but militancy is a difficult subject to be dealt with and I believe that a clear line has to be demarcated by media in Northeast to project them less. So long we continue to glorify insurgency and their issues they will continue to unleash terror and create fear in the minds of the people.*

According to Additional Deputy Director News, *Doordarshan News Guwahati*:

*There are very less peace makers or interlocutors in this region at the first place. And all the issues related are central verses state, militancy or the demand for separate sovereignty or freedom such as economic, territorial, and so on... So any individual even if he pretends to be an interlocutor there are very less chances that he/she may actually solve the massive problem. But some of the renowned persons of this region are chosen by both sides expecting immense impact. It is their projection and dealing with the subject that has brought peace to the region by inviting them to negotiation tables. And media has taken positive role to project the things in such a way that many underground groups have come to the mainstream and are living normal life and even contributing to build this nation a peaceful place to live. So the role of interlocutors is as much required as so many people to get involved in such matters. Intellectuals, renowned writers, social workers or senior citizens involved in peace talks and their projection in the media in a proper way to bring the light of hope of better days of the region. But at times it is also seen that just to gain media publicity people get into the mess.*

According to news channel Reporter and Lecturer at a private media institute:

*Personally peace makers are projected in the right manner in any media form. But once they are associated with any peace making process it begins to turn other way. Because of the existence of the politics and the dirty mind games the entire process of peace initiates die out. Sometimes it is felt as if the government has actually used peace makers to keep the violence continuing. It is also true that government use these people to keep their motives and wishes alive for the next election.*

**No Answer:** Notably 18% of respondents (Figure 4.7) refrained from commenting on representation of peacemaking activities and personalities involved, as they believed it was too sensitive issue to comment upon. This same mentality seems to be reflecting in media representations, as peacemaking and peace-makers are understood as too sensitive or secretive issue to be brought up in media. Some of the respondents even feel that peace makers is that functioning of the society which is not meant for the general public but is news for only a very selective few.

It is derived from the responses that reporting of peace efforts in media, especially in context of Assam, is considerably marginal. It may also be argued that media extensively explores every probable ethnicity issue while reporting instances of violence which often results in general narratives on ethnic identification of perpetrators and victims along with the scale of violence. Available literature and responses suggest that media is more inquisitive to identify the conflict on ethnicity basis with focus on the perpetrators' and victims' ethnic identities. Moreover the

assumed predisposed prejudiced attempts made by media to unearth ethnic connotation of violence are apparently criticised of overlooking the peace initiatives.

#### **4.6 Mainstream Media Collaborations**

News values, which apparently are market interest driven, seem to be similar for most media houses; atleast for the decision makers and the field reporters. Thus with similar understanding of news, the consumers and the industry, journalists tend to work on information with similar content and context to produce news, with similar representational approach. As the understanding of newsworthiness, news values, and deciding of the content and context of news representation hardly differs from house to house; regional and mainstream media irrespective of means and modes of production produce homogenous media products leaving limited scope for diversity of editorial opinion and varied news perspectives.

Irrespective of sever competition among media houses, most media houses work in collaboration with distinctive media houses usually among certain media house groups, depending broadly on ownership, political affiliation and sometimes coverage area. Specifically the news media houses- newspapers and television news channels collaborate to collect information, process and produce news so as to increase the regional cover of representation. Furthermore the media houses are seen sharing coverages and resources to fill the gap in content and at the same time maintaining a cut on budget. In the process of media collaboration, regional media houses have official tie-ups with the so called mainstream media houses and not only supply news content but supply content adhering to the context specific demands.

##### **4.6.1 Regional and National Media House' Collaborations**

No national media house has news correspondents in every state of the Northeastern region; most of the channels have one correspondent the whole of the northeastern region of India. It is absolutely impossible for one person to look into the happenings of the entire northeastern states. Media houses basically work in collaboration with local houses with exchange of stories. And because of these tie ups, i.e. the mainstream television channels take up only selective stories from respective regional channels and thus the Northeast gets projected in national media. for instance Delhi

based television news channel *CNN IBN* is seen broadcasting unedited footages directly picked up from regional *NE TV* giving due courtesy (see Image 9). It is derived from the responses that all the media houses of Assam work with media tie-ups with distant media houses or media conglomerates. Media practitioners were initially found to be reluctant to pronounce collaborative media houses, some of the derived specific responses are as follows:

- *DY365* subscribed stories from international news agency- Reuters and multimedia news agency- *Asian News International (ANI)*.
- *NEWS LIVE* has major tie-up with 24-hour English news channel with head office in Delhi- *Times Now* and some other regional channels.
- *Frontier TV* has collaborations with news agencies- *Press Trust of India (PTI)* largest news agency and *United News of India (UNI)* a multilingual news agency in India.
- The regional News Unit of *Doordarshan News* provides stories to *Doordarshan News (DD News)*, India's only 24-hour terrestrial television news channel; *British Broadcasting Corporation*, the public service broadcaster of the United Kingdom; and *Cable News Network*, American satellite television channel.
- Freelance journalists apparently contribute stories to various national and international media houses. Some mentioned news outlets like *ANI, PTI, ETV News, BBC, TELERAD, SRSG Broadcast Private Limited*, etc.

According to CEO & Content Editor of a regional multilingual news channel (*Frontier TV*):

*We have an arrangement with NWS (News Wire Service) and Associated Press. It is an arrangement by way of which, we provide them news and contents from Northeast and in lieu they give us national and international contents.*

Newspapers with nationwide circulation and beyond like *The Times of India* and *The Telegraph* have Guwahati editions of the newspaper which carry a regional supplementary newspaper along with the main one.

Clear influence of mainstream media is seen in the local media content, in selection as well as representation patterns. The local media houses seem to serve and play up stories which are prospective pick up stories for the mainstream national media houses. It is evident from the responses that most media houses in the region work in tie up format of news production and work in exchange of news reports, visuals and stories. In the work process it becomes essential for every individual journalist and each media house to file specific designated number of stories from the region which may be picked up by the mainstream media houses. These stories are expected to suffice to the requirement criteria of the mainstream and national media houses and must also qualify the news values yardstick of respective houses. In such a media scenario where acceptance by other (bigger or affiliated) media houses becomes so crucial for survival, journalists often tend to concentrate on stories which would interest the mainstream decision makers rather than projecting what should actually be represented in which manner from the region that might actually benefit the region. In the pursuit of stories that would interest the mainstream media, which apparently are stories with emphasis on violence from the region, especially Assam and the entire Northeast (section 3.2.12 and 3.3.3) the local media houses tend to overlook various other arrays of activities.

As general consensus, it was observed that violence which affects a large number of people is easily and instantly taken up by media houses. For the region is already branded as and known for only terror stricken, terror attacks by militant groups, ethnic clashes, etc. are supposed to grab headlines. And thus stories of mass violence are given priority over any other kind of news no matter how important it may be in real terms. Developmental stories and other regional events are segregated as less saleable stories and thus are kept away from the lead stories in the regional media, the so called mainstream media fail to even give coverage to them. This triggers a requirement of undertaking a thorough study on the approach of media representation of the region.

On the other hand there are instances where no regional media houses or media practitioner are seen to be supplying news input while reporting on regional incidents. As a case in point a report on Assam violence by Aljazeera English, an international

24-hour English language news and current affairs television channel, may be scrutinised (see Image 36). It is apparent that the journalist is reporting on violence in Assam's Kokrajhar and Sonitpur districts (as mentioned in the subtitle slot) from the national capital Delhi (reads the location tag in the visual report), situated miles away from the actual affected area. In similar situation where probably news inputs are neither authenticated nor well researched, information is obvious to get distorted before finally reaching to the media consumer. It is seen that in such situations, where there are no recent visual inputs available (either *LIVE* or otherwise), especially the electronic media houses play old file footages to make the news more presentable and appealing.

As a News Producer of regional television news channel points out:

*When recent footages are not available we send file footages from archives of similar instances to visually support the story. Most of the time violence is not identifiable so similar visuals work well. Moreover these visuals most of the time goes unidentified by mainstream media houses. In case of Assam violence all they require is houses burning or relief camps, these visuals remain same for all reports.*

Instances of file photographs being used in print media is usually less in number mostly due to the time factor. Print is not in such dire need for visuals. But again to depict violence print often uses graphical details such as maps, flow charts, etc. (see Image 40), or indirect depictions. In case of indirect depictions as well (see Image 1, 2) the magnitude of violence is disturbingly put across through images that otherwise do not defy the perceived rules of violence depiction using images of dead bodies, injured victims or blood. As Shyam Tekwani (2008) states elaborating upon conflict reporting situations “in a region like India's troubled northeast, the threat of stringer monopoly is a serious problem. Since the culture of journalist training is non-existent, foreign agencies tend to offer stringerships to one or two journalists who can write according to the agency's style. Such journalist tend to end up with a monopoly-between two or three of them- they report for all the top global agencies, broadcast stations and big Western newspapers. It becomes a bit of a privileged club that “creates” stories by mutual consent and effort” (Tekwani 91). Moreover even respondents confirmed that media report with reference to violence is often echoed without much prior attempt of verifying facts and figures. As rightly figured out seeing the existing trend of media collaborations and extremely high competition, and

conformed by media practitioners' survey results, "In an era of cut-throat channel competition, when all reporters fancy breaking news and staying ahead of others, a story run by one channel is often blindly picked up by others. This happens a lot in remote region like Northeast. So a peer or two can start bogus story packaged sensationally and many others just follow them into perpetuating the fraud" (Tekwani 92).

#### **4.7 Solution**

It is evident that media representations have strong influence in constructing perceptions of the world for the media consumers. Perhaps it is irrefutably accepted that media representations are not reality but are constructions of reality which considerably differ from the actual depending upon various factors and circumstances. A selective section of media practitioners in power of decision making have the final say in deciding upon the representation content, context and patterns. In case of Assam and the Northeast the media representations have been fundamentally instrumental in distorting the image of the whole region and people leading to skewed perceptions of the entire society of media consumers; which may be thus attributed to the media makers directly or indirectly. In this section respondents were made rethink about issues of diversity representation and figure out possible solution to counter selective, patterned and stereotypical projection of the region, encourage more accurate portrayals of varied issues which are so far neglected.

It may be summed up that there are mainly two distinctive reactions to negative representation of violence in media, one section of media practitioners, considerably lesser in number, believe that violent content in media is a result of media's social responsibility to inform and thus it is a must representation for the welfare of the society. Another section of respondents, apparently the bulk of the industry, believe that violence is entertaining for its consumers as well as is indisputably acceptable which makes violence an essential representation to survive in the highly competitive media industry. Thus to find a solution to the existing trend of selective reporting of violence specifically from Assam in media, it becomes essential to make the media practitioners aware of the consequences the representation of violence is having on media consumers. As Bala Kumar affirms "the negative impact of media violence on

children is supported by hundreds of studies and research materials, yet the industry (producers and distributors of Entertainment Violence) choose to ignore these facts and continue” (17). Similarly experts have pointed at extensive viewing of violence in media resulting in increased crime rates. Moreover there are numerous instances that confirm media’s role as a catalyst in creating strong perceptions, generating fear and even moral panics.

Censorship may be assumed to be the most probable solution to curb the ill effects of extensive media violence. As per respondents in conformation to literature, explicit violent content in media may be censored mostly considering the consequences on media consumers. While some believe that distorting direct visual representation damage may be controlled, but what is missed out is the impact of the representation as a concept that acts on media consumers and not distinctively as visuals or the news story. The ideologies propagated and the intensions that work behind media representations also require to be relooked into so as to minimise negative effect of reports of violence. Thus it may also require bridging the gap between the academia and the industry to overcome the inappropriateness of representation of violence and its effects on society.

#### **4.7.1 Positive Imaging through Media Representations: Context and Feasibility**

The pursuit of profit in the highly competitive media industry apparently seems to have altered the entire profile of the desired media, as revealed by literature review and gathered responses. This calls for seeking solution to the prevalent media scenario from gradual amplification in regard to detailed and uncensored violence reporting, at the regional as well as the national level. It requires to be addressed how imaging the region in positive light through media may be practiced to portray Assam in particular and the Northeast in general to the media consumers. It also needs to be defined how in representing the real scenario, breaking stereotypes and exploring newer aspects from the region other than violence becomes essential. Media looking beyond commercial gains may serve the society better as the fourth pillar and fulfil social responsibilities without hampering sentiments of the people and the image of the

region. A need was also felt to look into if at all revisiting the media scenario is feasible in today's media context of Northeast and Assam needs to be analysed.

The responses (Figure 4.8) on Positive imaging through Media Representations: Context and Feasibility may be categorised as below:

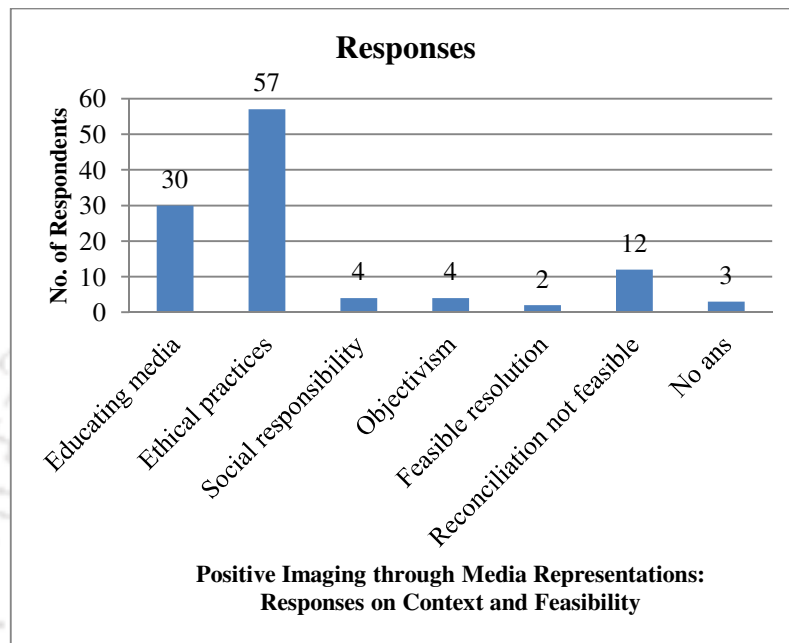


Figure 4.8: Responses on Positive Imaging through Media Representations: Context and Feasibility

**Educating media:** 27% of respondents (Figure 4.8) refer to media education specifically among media practitioners as the required element to change the patterned representation in media. Media education on the whole also includes media literacy, generating public awareness along with educating the practitioners about the norms and guidelines regarding representation of vital issues such as violence. Respondents also hinted that along with educating the media practitioners about the ground realities and the impact of media representation of violence it becomes equally significant to educate the media consumers about media representations.

As CEO & Content Editor, multilingual television news channel puts it:

*Northeast media needs trained man-power and trained bosses, who run TV channels or media houses and a regulatory body, so that they work in a framework. I am not trying to demean anybody, Northeast has some of the best editors and journalists but somewhere I see that we have forgotten our responsibility as journalists.*

According to Assistant Producer (English News) regional television channel:

*First and foremost it is very essential to hold orientation programs on practicing journalism ethics in every news organization from time to time. The editorial policies on reporting violence should be reviewed from time to time. If any news has to be reported depicting any form of violence it is very essential to look into the language, tone and images used. It is very much feasible if the very process is systematized from the editorial board and trained people are recruited.*

According to freelance Journalist, and Secretary of Guwahati Press Club:

*Assigning important coverage beats to trained personals is very essential. On job training as well as constant development programmes on newer concepts of reporting and dealing with conflict regions is required to be organised for specific beat journalists. Only then reporters and producers would know exactly what is to be covered and how without getting carried away by other lucrative story angles or even offers for a matter of fact, especially when the state image is at stake. The image of the region can be changed considerably by trained professionals in media from the region.*

**Ethical practices:** A majority of 51% of respondents (Figure 4.8) refer to the following of ethical practices as the only way to solution. This may again be linked to the spreading of media literacy and awareness among media practitioners with focus on media ethics.

According to Freelance senior journalist of the region:

*Bringing to the fore the key issues and facts responsible in an unbiased, balanced and ethical way for the sole purpose of disseminating information for public awareness without hurting the sentiments of the masses which may cause strife and tension between different sections of people.*

According to Senior Copy Editor of a regional English language newspaper organisation:

*Use of correct words in unbiased news stories, sustained and positive criticism reporting on development issues. However, these have become mere theoretical words in 24x7 news coverage by TV channels and race to get scoop stories.*

According to Producer (News) regional television channel:

*Media definitely has to report which includes positive as well as negative incidents. The positive aspects of this region should be emphasised rather than highlighting the negative ones. In today's world media has a major role to play in the domain development communication and it certainly can contribute towards changing perception of people by giving more coverage to positive aspects.*

According to Regional correspondent of a National English language newspaper with Guwahati edition:

*Media always plays a big role in places like northeast, where mass react to news items. Media with its sensible presentation of news can lead the mass to a positive direction and it's still feasible with sound effort.*

According to Desk Editor and Feature writer of regional newspaper published from Guwahati in English:

*Every media report needs to be free of prejudice and cultural stereotypes. While sentiments always give news reports a human touch, this needs to be left to expert speakers and the audience to delve into. The social responsibility of the media is to report what is happening in all places without prejudice. It needs to tell people what is happening, not what to think. If moral policing or nationalist/communal agendas become part of a news report, it will never be a true news report.*

According to Sub-Editor of a regional vernacular language newspaper organisation:

*Understanding the depth of any story, the good and the bad impact it can have, and understanding whether it can influence people's attitudes positively. This media attitude requires media ethics to be followed.*

According to News coordinator of a regional television news channel:

*There have been only a few instances where a media house has provoked the sentiments of the people of the state. On most occasions, the editors and senior editorial staff (role) make sure the content and the representation of news do not hurt anybody's sentiments.*

According to Freelance journalist reporting from Assam:

*To be the fourth pillar of democracy it has to work towards projecting the good and the bad in the same light. Media should be regulated by the dictums of any political leader or party or business. It should be free and at the same time abide by the rule of the law. It should be positive in approach.*

According to Reporter of a regional television news channel and also Faculty at a Media institute:

*Media has a great responsibility towards the society; also it can never publish or telecast anything that harms the sentiments of the general public. But as a fourth pillar of democracy it's also important in terms of media to show the daily happenings of the society. Balanced and unbiased practice is required while dealing with sensitive stories.*

Referring to the social responsibility of media of maintaining national integrity before promoting individualistic ideologies, Senior Journalist at Press Trust of India cited:

*Journalists while reporting violence in the media should remember that they are part of a group or nation, identity. Their national identities are also relevant in reporting except their personal and professional experience in violence reporting. Assam and Northeast is part of India. It's a country as a whole that has to be understood first.*

**Social responsibility:** 4% of respondents feel that media should be more responsible towards the society in its representations.

According to News Editor of a vernacular newspaper organization:

*This is feasible in the context of today and always perhaps only if media owners are socially responsible. The concern in media should be not to strategise violence for gains but to improve the content and quality to serve the society better.*

**Objectivism:** 4% respondents (Figure 4.8) By simply providing the news and let the people decide about what they think of it. What is missing in media today is objectivism. As long as this is practiced, media can serve the society better as the fourth pillar. Media needs to be just informer and educator without taking sides with any group, company etc. It is very much possible because the role of media is same everywhere.

According to freelance journalist covering entire Northeast:

*Reporting should be objective. The representation should not be verdict or judgement by the media.*

**Feasible resolution:** 2% interviewed (Figure 4.8) only opined that changing the prevalent media situation seems possible.

According to Copy Editor, English-language newspaper published from Guwahati:

*It is very much feasible in today's media context of Northeast and Assam as the way of representation of incidents in this region by a section of local media is painting a wrong picture of the region before the outside world.*

According to News Producer (Assamese News) of the state owned TV channel telecasting from Guwahati:

*Yes it is obviously possible. But only moral and conscience put together one can produce the events or particular subject in a positive manner. If it is a continuous effort in case of 24 hours channel you need inputs for every hour, minute and second. In that case when input is unavailable then they repeat the same event or occasion or news over and over. So it is*

*important to get updated; make your system network position in such way that you can avoid reproducing and update people according to the situation. Network for news updating should be developed. The pros and cons of the fact is that sometimes you are half informed and you are informing people quarterly. Hard work is required on the part of journalists from the region as well, to be fully aware of the facts and situations.*

**Reconciliation not feasible:** 11% respondents (Figure 4.8) opine against the possibility of alteration in media representations and focus on positive aspects of life. Competition and commercialisation were cited as major drawback in media practices which makes positive imaging look unfeasible in present day context.

According to Sub-editor of English language newspaper published from Guwahati:

*Not feasible until all the media houses comes to an understanding about maintaining objectivity. One house cannot volunteer to do so keeping in view the completion in media today.*

According to News Producer, regional news channel Guwahati:

*It will take time...the media is new...the viewers are yet not matured... as long as media commercialisation exists... it is not possible.*

In trying to figure out the frame work for positive imaging and representation of events other than violence only in communicating through the media world, from the derived responses an attempt was made to evaluate if such system can be practiced, feasibility studied. The major requirement to change the media scenario was found to be done away with unprofessionalism and thus media practitioners reporting on violence should be trained professionally and constant upgradation may be maintained to be aware of the ground realities as well as representation. It was noted that no respondent mentioned about the concept of conflict reporting or peace journalism being formally needed to be practiced so as to look for a solution for conflicts through representations and not propagate violence only. It was derived from the responses that Assam in particular with abundant references to similar incidents from entire Northeast, was being represented in media through primarily reporting of violence. Apparently the most followed media practice of reporting Assam is through reporting of selective violence incidents, limited scope of affirmative stories in media with the exception of conflicts, patterned projection for commercial gains (derived from literature review and earlier section responses). Seeking solution to this existing trend in media practice and studying feasibility for positive imaging, Peace journalism

model of media representation seems to be one option. Reporting violence in media may be judged according to Johan Galtung model of war and peace journalism. Drawing similar lines between the respondents' responses and the two models of news representation by Galtung, it may be said that 86% respondents in total from the media fraternity, though accept that in practice reporting Assam has been on the lines of War Journalism- more propaganda oriented; in reality the focus may be needs to shift to Peace Journalism instead. With more trained professionals with understanding of ground reality and the subject, ethical practices being followed, media being aware of its social responsibilities, objectively reporting incidents without focusing on commercial gains, and attempting resolution of conflict situations through media representations would be a more consolidated way of seeking solutions as per responses derived.

#### **4.7.2 Overcoming the Obstacles of the Politics of Representation of Violence in Media**

Media houses are apparently more keen on increasing TRPs and circulation figures for which they employ various means and methods to attract consumer attention and hold. It was apparent that violence is one such means might be the most effective one and the widely used ploy engaged and extensively exploited by media. Though most of the media practitioners interviewed seemed to be well aware and practicing the known method of representation of violence, a section of respondents were apparently found to be disapproving of the prevalent politics of representation.

The responses (Figure 4.9) on Overcoming the Obstacles of the Politics of Representation of Violence in Media may be categorised as below:

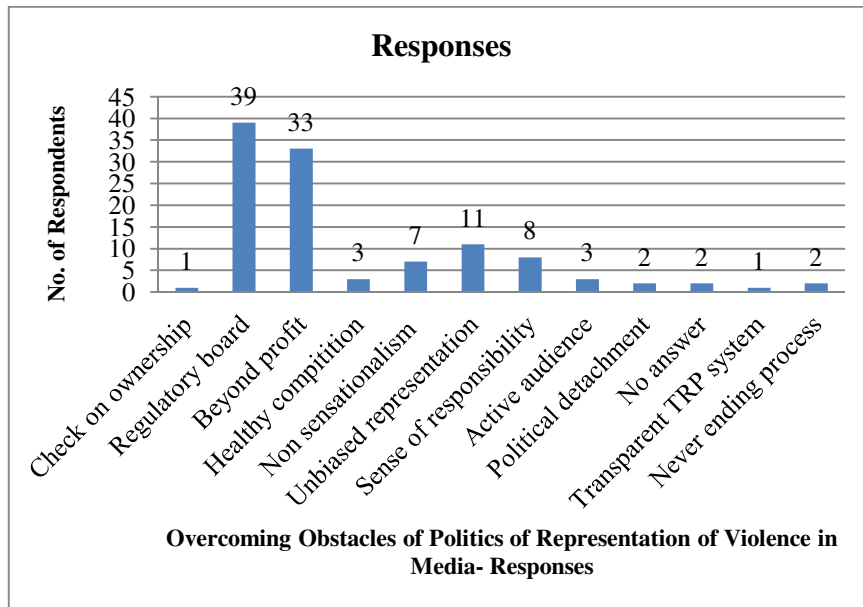


Figure 4.9: Responses on Overcoming the Obstacles of the Politics of Representation of Violence in Media

**Check on ownership:** 1% of respondents (Figure 4.9) refer check media ownership and media conglomerations as possible way of overcoming the obstacles of the politics of representation of violence in media.

**Regulatory board:** 35% of respondents (Figure 4.9) feel only way to overcome the obstacles of the politics of representation of violence is setting up of strict regulatory bodies. Apparently respondents believe there has to be some kind of regulatory body to regulate the content of violence in media. Majority of the media makers who fault the media representation of selective violence in content and explicit presentation feel the need of censorship. But simultaneously they also problematise censorship as hindrance to the practice of constant and rapid media productions with time constrains.

According to CEO & Content Editor of a regional television news channel:

*A consensus has to be build among all media houses, which should say that media will not hype up issues related to violence. So that uniformity can be maintained to highlight such issue is a sober way, so as to inform the audience/readers/listeners. There needs to be a censoring regulatory body.*

**Beyond profit:** 29% respondents (Figure 4.9) raised the point of over-commercialisation of the media industry and apparently hinted at only way of overcoming the profit making attitude of the media industry, individuals and

organisations on the whole may change situations. As stated by a respondent, “rethinking business” is the only way of overcoming the obstacles of the politics of representation of violence in media

Precisely put by News Producer (English News) of a regional television news channel suggested that media representations should look beyond profit motive in the highly competitive market to counter the obstacles of the politics of representation particularly instances of violence:

*First the media should understand the sole purpose the presence of the media. Secondly, the media should not be too much emphasized on only making profit. Thirdly, should not be biased and politically oriented towards a particular party. Lastly, could have been very positive if all media housed could have been like the BBC mode of functioning.*

According to Desk Editor of a regional television news channel:

*Absolutely no emotional drama, as this incites violence. Correct statistics, as rounded off figures exaggerate reports. Reports should not aim at TRPs rather concentrate of facts.*

**Healthy competition: 3%** respondents (Figure 4.9) referred to healthy competition in media to overcome politics of representation.

According to Copy Editor of a regional English language newspaper:

*Taking part and encouraging healthy competition; due coverage and representation of violence in an unbiased manner without exaggeration or undue sensationalism; avoiding the unprofessional practices of cheque-book and yellow journalism; mutual respect for each other (in terms of media houses); not bowing down before or getting attached to any political power; acting as the fourth pillar of democracy by being a medium of information dissemination, a gatekeeper and a mouthpiece of the masses.*

**Non sensationalism: 6%** respondents (Figure 4.9) refer to non sensationalist representation of violence if practiced only then media would be able to overcome politics of representation.

According to Correspondent of an English language newspaper:

*The possible solution to overcome the obstacles of the politics of representation of violence in the media could be equal representation of all places and people. Not blowing up one instance of violence and ignoring significant number of others.*

According to Desk Editor of Regional News (English and Assamese News) channel based from Assam:

*What media houses should refrain from trying to get politicians or other such stakeholders talk when any such incident occurs because they are sure to use it as an opportunity of mud-slinging and the real issue gets diluted.*

**Unbiased representation: 10% respondents** (Figure 4.9) refer to unbiased representation of violence as a way to overcome the obstacles of politics of representation. Respondents apparently point at use of objectivity and correct statistics while reporting violence as rounded off figures exaggerate the report and also give preordained magnitude to the incident.

According to Assistant Producer (English News) of a regional television news channel:

*Fair, accurate and unbiased reporting can overcome the politics of representation of violence. When all sides of the story are presented people will decide for themselves the right from the wrong or identify the grey areas. Instead of painting or projecting an incident it is always better to report the incident with sensitivity and proper reasoning applied.*

According to Sub-editor of a vernacular language newspaper published from Guwahati:

*In a nation like India where everything is politicised, journalists are not separate from it. Still they should follow maintain ethicality in reporting without taking any sides. They should consider the ground of humanity only in such cases.*

According to Desk Editor cum anchor, of a regional television news channel:

*Assumptions should not be made on emotional grounds, but on actual facts and figures. For example, a bomb blast in Chandmari in Guwahati is automatically thought of as the work of ULFA, this could be wrong speculation.*

**Sense of responsibility:** With a sense of responsibility and service, violence representation in media can be streamlined. 7% respondents (Figure 4.9) apparently suggest that for violence related stories journalist should be aware of their social responsibility and thus accordingly prepare the story line.

**Active audience:** Awareness and knowledge on the part of media consumers is expected to enable them to be critical consumers of the media and not just passive receivers of the media texts. 3% of the respondents (Figure 4.9) refer to active

audience participation as a probable way of overcoming obstacles of violence representation in media.

As Freelance journalist and Editor in chief of regional news portal points out:

*The viewers of our country are not yet mature. It will take long time unless there is full literacy and people to reject violence. However when there is violence happening media has to cover it. Once violence stops getting the first page covered with violence readers or headlines in television with extensive violence are discarded, things will change.*

According to a Producer of a regional television news channel:

*People should use multiple channels to verify and create concrete perceptions about any region. Compare television reports or paper reports and ofcourse on web.*

**Political detachment:** 2% respondents (Figure 4.9) opine media functioning should be kept away from direct or indirect politics influence so as to not make representations complicated and biases.

Producer News of Regional News Unit of *Doordarshan News* states:

*Media is having a responsible job to build the country in a positive way to show or highlights the glimpses of future in positive way so that the generation next should not feel underprivileged and deprived. If the intention is good possible ways will emerge to prevent the violence. But if the motto is not clean and sharp the message will be impacted in different ways. In case financial gains is the only motive behind certain representations of a region then the representation of the place event or location can never be right portrayal of the place event or people through media. Political influence is bound to ruin representations further.*

According to News coordinator, regional News channel from Guwahati:

*There is no politics as such. If the news is worth enough to be showed on air then it is done with utmost care and precaution. News channels and papers do not rely only on violence for their revenue. It is only a part.*

**Transparent TRP system:** 1% respondents (Figure 4.9) problematise the TRP (Television Rating Point) system of calculating and evaluating viewership patterns of television audience. Derived data is used to decide upon the programmes and channels with highest viewership and in turn decide the advertisement rates and quality of programming on television. The inadequate sample size of the electronic rating system apparently provides very limited viewership data. The present sample, with devices set up in posh pockets of selective cites, is criticised to give away

skewed city centric responses and ignore the rural audiences and scarcely populated areas.

As pointed out by a News Producer of a regional television news channel:

*Wider readership feedback surveys may reflect the true nature of the perception of audience tastes, and lead towards change in media content and representation patterns.*

**Never ending process:** 2% of the respondents (Figure 4.9) opine that politics of representation is an ongoing process and certain obstacle would be unfeasible to overcome with the growing media industry, wide reach and varied consumer groups.

According to Freelance journalist and Editor Jeevan Magazine:

*The politics of representation of violence in media will stay as long as corporatisation of media continues in this glocalised world.*

According to Sub-editor, English Language newspaper published from Guwahati:

*I don't have any solution to this. For, as long as there is this politics you are speaking about, the news will sell and bring profit to the owners. Media is a business today. Journalism and profit-making go hand-in-hand these days. Although some houses will go by its ethics, it will never leave a chance to highlight (not sensationalise) some forms of violence that might bring them the bucks.*

Politics of representation elaborates upon accuracies and inaccuracies of specific representations. In order to understand true meanings of representations it is required to understand the approaches of representation. The *reflective approach* to representation proposes imitation or reflection and claims that language mirrors true meaning as it exists in the world (Hall 1997: 24). On the contrary to the reflective theory of representation is the *intentional theory* which reduces the representation to the intentions of its author only (35). Another approach the *constructionist theory* suggests meanings are contextual and proposes a more complex and mediated relationship between things and the world (35). "The correlation between the material, the conceptual and the signifying are governed by our cultural and linguistic codes and it is this set of interconnections which produces meaning" (35). As established meanings are generated by individuals or groups (155) where representations are organised into systems which are deployed by social classes and other groups 'in order to make sense of, figure out and render intelligible the way society works' (26).

The constructionist approach is seen to have significant impact on cultural studies and media studies. This also signifies that representations are instrumental in shaping of collective perceptions. The process of representation further explores how cultural signs and images generate meanings to the world rather than merely reflecting it.

Responding refer to various attributes to what according to them could be the possible ways to overcome the obstacles of the politics of representation of violence in the media, the media practitioners majorly feel the need of effective censorship and non-commercial journalistic practices. In general media representation in respect to reporting of violence instances of Assam and Northeast entirely has been more on exaggerating of facts and figures with dominant theme of violence. The usability of a piece of information to be worthy of media representation is understood to be the magnitude of violence and number of people affected by it. In context of politics of representation, the intended message to be communicated by the media producer works in correlation with the audience perceptions and leads to an understanding of constructed realities as real, which stands the biggest obstacle to be overcome by media- practitioners as well as consumers. Media reports need to work independent of influential factors like politics, authoritative control, peer pressure, unethical practices, so as to serve the society of non-passive consumers and defy existing negative representation pattern with focus on violence.

#### **4.8 Conclusion**

This chapter was an attempt to understand specific aspects of media representations with reference to reporting of violence in respect to the locale - the gender issues, indigenous identity issues and peace talks in light of extremism. Media is the major source of information about gender groups, racial and ethnic identities (Greenberg & Brand). Gender constructions in reporting of violence were predominantly found to be prejudiced, with women been treated mostly as quintessential victim in regard to involvement of women in explicit collective violence situations. The women issues in respect to reporting of violence apparently is found to be given prominence in media in order to match the human angle stories, used mostly to either create fear or sympathy among the consumers and thus sell the story. Along with the stereotypical representation of women in media in relation to violence and conflict situations the media is also criticised of exploiting the gender issues to flare up the violence. As

Paula Banerjee states referring to the whole of South Asia in her essay “Resisting Erasure: Women IDPs in South Asia”, women are taken to be belonging to their respective communities and not individual entities with power and control. Thus attacking the women means attacking the entire community. As “media reporting of a rape of Hindu Women by Muslim men leading to targeting of Muslim women in the riots.” in Ghodhra Riots in Gujarat (Banerjee 2005: 305) “the media often plays up this concept of women’s honour to incite one group of people against another” (Banerjee 2005: 305). A similar incident may be cited in the history of representations in Assam as well, when the Adivasi girl was stripped in broad daylight. Direct visuals of the violence were broadcasted by regional as well as mainstream television news channels (see Image 27) and the exposed woman made cover photographs in newspapers (see Image 25, 26) with very little editing along with *LIVE* visuals of the mass violence. The representation of violence with unrestricted portrayal of the victim confirms the poor gender perspective of media and also questions the media tendency of selling news highlighting aspects that are media proven to attract instant consumer attention. The case of displaced women as a result of violent incidents is also found to be the same, but regional as well as mainstream media finds very less to do here. Other than depicting women as victims, it has never bothered to look in other aspects of gender and violence. For instance as in *The Telegraph* news report the news story rests on the image with supporting captions and title. 'Terror, state & media-Northeast echoes' implicitly tries to depict women and children as the victims of the violence (see Image 14), with elaborate caption ‘Assam has the largest number of internally displaced persons who are languishing in relief camps since 1998 and live in sub-human conditions, but the rehabilitation of these displaced children of lesser Gods has never been taken seriously by any government’. The cover story of *India Today* (see Image 12), the Ground Report visuals of *IBN Live* (see Image 13), the *NewsX* exclusive report on lakhs of children being displaced due to violence (see Image 15) or the *BBC News* report image of Assam violence (see Image 16) are few such instances, apparently numerous similar instances may be witnessed in media where strong images and visuals have been used by various media houses to depict the victimisation of women and children. Often in follow-up stories of violence instances, with male dominating the content, women are “systematically ignored in resettlement process as well” (Banerjee 2005: 307). Here again raises the question if

there are certain set rules for representation of the violence in media, and if so whether preordained portrayal of women as victims is considered fair representation and media exposing the victim's identity (in various instances where victims are especially women) is ethical or are there ways of dealing with violence, victims and perpetrators in a more sensible manner. Apart from identifying prejudiced gender constructions and representation imbalance in the media coverage of women in regard to violence; the study also revealed that participation, prospects and power of women journalists were very restricted in the media industry of the region.

As Stein and Friedrich (1975) opines television is "not a mirror of the society, it is a prism that selects and focuses attention on the values of the dominant culture" (241). Media may exacerbate tensions between ethnic groups or between groups and mainstream, which has actually been the case of Assam. Thus in representation of conflicts, with media frenzy about ethnicity, presentation of oversimplified two dimensional analyses of right and wrong hinders the creation of solution. The media tendency is often found to be that of creating clashable groups in the minds of people and giving verdicts without recognising the legitimate interests of all sides. In present day context one of the burning issues in Assam as referred to by respondents and broadly suggested by regional media representations over a period of time, perhaps is the "illegal Bangladeshi immigrants". The issue of Bangladeshi migration to Assam has been extensively covered by the local media and perceiving it as a threat to the national identity even the mainstream or the national media seems to have played up the issues at every possible occasion. The media constructed Assamese identity in its various representations, though much debated, is taken to be in danger because of the Bangladeshi migrants (Glebova 19). In the language of media "...migration from Bangladesh is Assam's "most fatal malady", a "plague" and a "ticking bomb" while the migrants themselves are referred to as "infiltrators" and "encroachers" who pose a threat both to the security of the state and the identity of the Assamese people" (19, 20). Similarly referring to the violence in Guwahati of 2007 in "Crime in Daylight" a political scientist's opinion was "The barbaric act was done by a few perverted people. The national media is trying to project the issue as a struggle between the Assamese and Adivasi people which is not. The Adivasis are an important component of Assamese society" (Rehman). There are several other instances where media

constructed identities in respect to region, religion, caste, ethnicity, identity etc have been the cause of furthering rigidity, conflict and violence among communities. For instance in a special report from Assam a mainstream television news channel focuses on identifying the culprits of Assam violence which is more of identifying the onlookers in political administrative scenario rather than actual perpetrators of the crime (see Image 42). On the other hand there are reports with extensive focus on militancy and sectarian violence tries to recognise and categorise the perpetrators and the victims (see Image 17) to an extent of giving away verdicts.

Usually the construction of regional identity finds prominence in media representations than the attempt of generating a national identity through media texts (Singh and Singh 2008: 120). Hereby indigenous identity issues specific to the region reflected in media representations may be considered significant in crisis situations and in resolving conflict. While a section of respondents and available literature highlight the limited media space and time provided to the Northeast other than few instances of violence that shoot up to instant media attention, another strong view also persists of biased news of violence and victims that spread to the rest of the world through stereotypical representations of the selective instances of violence picked by media.

As Rajdeep Sardesai (2012) citing the example of Assam violence of 2012 accuses “the media of making editorial choices based on the religious identity of the 'victim'”. But in contrast to religious identities at conflict in Assam as Nandana Dutta (2012) points out the contention in “...was not between Hindus and Muslims, but between the speakers of two major languages in colonial Assam- the Bengalis and Assamese”. In this context one has to understand the politics of normative language regarding the understanding of Assam and how experts perceive, identify, respond and report violence.

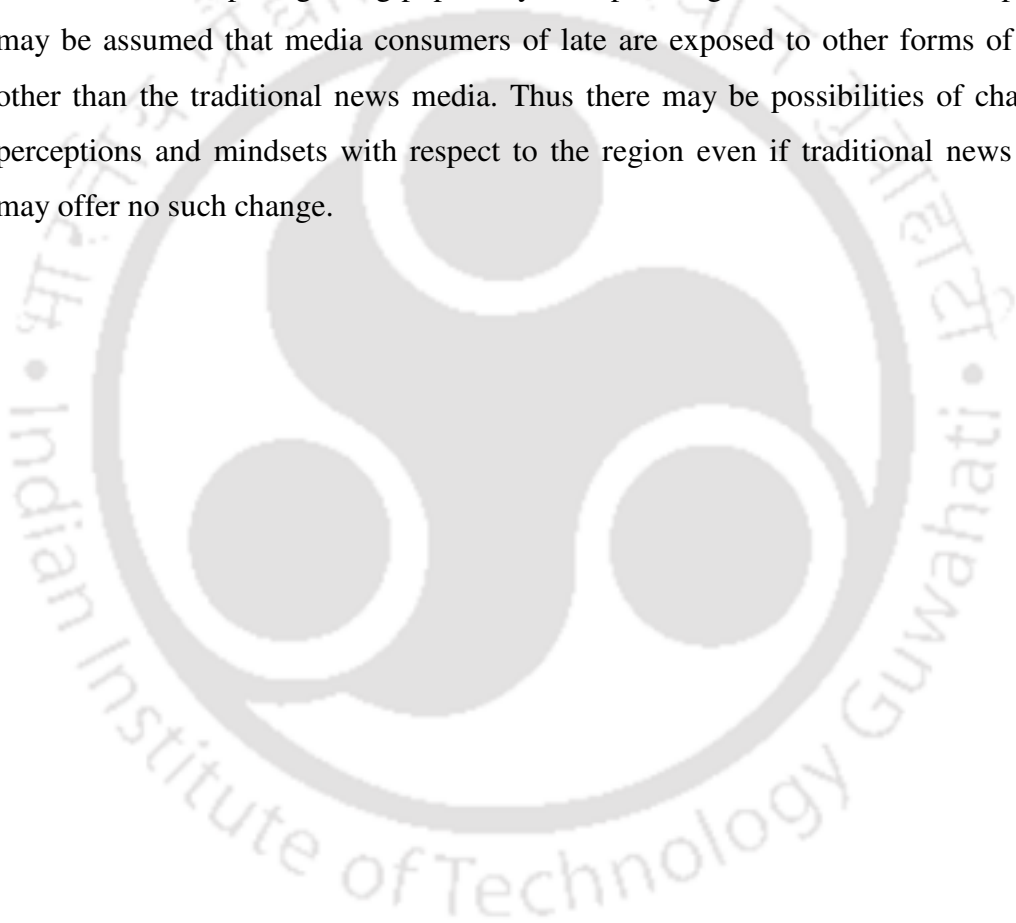
Many journalists have a soft corner for the extremist groups and identify with their ideologies and support the cause. This apparently is understood by some to hamper media objectivity as in representation of violence relating to these outfits the representation pattern clearly tries to justify the violence for the cause. Also as

literature suggests “there is a sympathy among a section of local media for rebels, ‘our boys syndrome’ affecting the objectivity, neutrality of media to a large extent” (Sen 94). On the other hand uncontrolled media ownership is also results in certain ideologies and patterns being reflected in media texts. It is derived that media houses in Assam have direct ownership by political entities or have strong influences of politics over media organisations. Thus use of authoritative power over representation and also over media practitioners obstructs free and fair representation of specific instances of violence. As a results of this ideological bend in representation, certain aspects of the region while are over emphasised in media on the other hands some aspects are purposively omitted from being represented. According to a major section of respondents, the regional as well as the mainstream media may have failed to yield desired outcome of violence representation.

In the pursuit of identifying the possibilities and expectations of positive imaging of the region through representation in media, other than blindly following the long existing trend of focusing on violence and unrest; it was derived from the responses that slow changes in the media industry are being made by small section of media practitioners. Respondents opine that there is a need to look beyond the profit making motive of the media houses and individual media practitioners.

Often the media consumers are unaware of the influence of the information received through media is having on them, particularly the way in which the information is presented by media. And moreover there are less means and opportunities to ensure that all the information received through media on important issues are accurate and objective and not views of the producing section. In such a scenario, it remains on the part of the media practitioners and the media decision makers to decide upon what the media consumers are entitled to know, what they want to know, how and how much they should be presented. It also depends upon the media to figure out the consequences of reporting sensitive issues and deciding upon the content and representation. With reference to Assam, amid a widespread perception of corporate media and purposive reporting of violence, the media is apparently desired to be functional and constructive as public-interested media and not sensational profit making media.

Information gathering, processing and presenting in order to formulate news continues to evolve. Similarly the consumption procedure along with the availability of modes and convergence possibilities of media has also been evolving leading to a shift in interests and demands of consumers regarding content depending upon context of production as well as consumption. As was mentioned by very limited number of respondents during the survey, but may be seen as an important point of analysis- active audience participation may reduce a lot of impropriations of representation of violence. With the opening up of more avenues of media forms with the social media space gaining popularity and spreading in reach and consumption, it may be assumed that media consumers of late are exposed to other forms of media other than the traditional news media. Thus there may be possibilities of change in perceptions and mindsets with respect to the region even if traditional news media may offer no such change.



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## Chapter V

### Conclusion

#### 5.1 Effective Media Representation: Northeast Context

Probably the biggest problem with media violence is the probable influence it has on its consumers. News has been becoming more violent with every growing incident of violence and its representation more detailed and graphical in various modes of media. More so regarding Assam and the entire Northeast (clubbed as a whole in media consciousness in respect to the mainstream) stories are apparently exaggerated, under-represented or mis-represented. In all assembled facts are constructed into reality and represented for the expected passive media consumers. As seen in the earlier chapters the media constructed stereotypes and conflict narratives, require to be deconstructed.

This section foregrounds the need for studying the means and methods of effective media communication with specific reference to Assam in the Indian context by examining the role of media and audience perception of imaging by media communication. Media is considered the mirror of society; representation methods may be through the recent development of digital as well as maintaining the essence of traditional methods. Effective media depends on the efficacy of motivating affirmative role in the society's progress. Here the question arises: what needs to be addressed or understood? Is it about the specific role of local, regional and national mainstream channels; how do these behave and conduct themselves? Positive mediation would generate positive thinking when it reaches the mass. How far the said media is performing in this regard, has been a considerable area of study.

The basic difference between the western and Indian cultures is the homogeneity in the western and the heterogeneity in the Indian. Indian culture is vast, varied and exclusive. In northeast context as well there are various aspects that need to be highlighted and worked upon by the media to generate a positive perception among its consumers. Thus this factor of propagating Indianness to serve a wide range of

audience through media is something that may not be adequately understood using western theories and practices. Simply imitating does not seem to serve the desired purpose for every local context to be understood, represented and evaluated. Therefore the theories that are required to study the local media should be context-specific and local. The concept of dewesternisation has come into being because of the misfit between the western theories and non-western realities. But dewesternisation in this regard does not entirely mean discarding the existing theories; it may be more or less adapting for local contexts and finding out newer ways to address local contexts. It also is using and studying appropriate communication methods which facilitate gaining certain social goals with specific reference to media and communication, representation and perception creation.

## **5.2 Discussion**

Media representations with reference to reporting of violence in Assam apparently has been to grab quick attention. In doing so media practitioners from the region seem to overlook the fact that in specifically reporting on event specific sensational images they are instead creating and propagating a more of a negative image of the location and society among a wider audience, creating and popularising and spreading inappropriate perceptions. It needs to be considered that direct reporting of social evils does not propagate stability, instead creates fear among the masses and in a way also seems to encourage the ill doers. In case of Assam active audience participation and ignorance of media producers can be said to be the reason so far for the present state. And thus understanding the ground reality becomes very important in order to find out the actual scenario and to what extent the damage has already been done to the image of the region projected in media through various, multifaceted representation of violence.

Based on the responses obtained, it was reconfirmed that news from the region with the basic motive of information communication, is mostly a glimpse of the actual (people, places or events), most of which is either unknown or unexplored reality; and rest is not represented in media except the sensational part which is only understood as being capable of attracting a large spectrum of varied audience far and across. Respondents belonging to various strata of the media industry were found to be in

consensus with the view of the academicians and locals on the way Northeast has been projected outside the region through violence only. Coverage of violence specific to Northeast, mostly in news item, is more oriented towards sensationalising stories rather than educating or informing the consumers. Content analysis proves that generalised media texts on Northeast India define the region as bomb blasts, terrorism, infiltration, ethnic clashes, political violence, kidnappings, extortions militants, killings by security forces in actual or staged encounters, etc. Moreover, many of the respondents from the media fraternity believe that these misrepresentations in turn lead to further conflicts, tensions and violence. The national media houses give very less time and space to news from the region justifying it to be the region being out of proximity area. Whatever coverage is at all given is expected to be of massive potential, enough to grab mass attention.

It becomes decisive in studying representations in media to analyse the established link between cultural reproduction and the role of the mass media which refers broadly at the “politics of gender and violence” (Appadurai 45).

### **5.2.1 Violence in media- A Matter of Concern**

The issue of media violence has turned out to be a serious matter of concern for academicians and the society as a whole. Increasingly the debate regarding media and violence seems to be focusing on the culture of violence; which seems to be normalising violence and aggression and consecutively is creating a lack of empathy in our society. Throughout ages the depiction of violence has evolved in a number of media formats on various media channels and forms. Media, in all its formats, has more or less evolved to be an entertainment and information industry with little or no concern about the impact it may have on its consumers. It creates an interesting and important area of study to analyse the ways and to what extent violence is being represented in various media products by its creators.

Media consumers are considered as the imperative factor of the whole industry and thus the audience perspective plays a significant role in the area of media violence study. Considering the large and varied audience of the mass media with social, psychological, cultural, regional and age differences; their acceptance, rejections and

reactions and effects on them are undoubtedly varied as well. And thus this also raises opportunity of context specific detailed study on the effects of media violence on specified end user groups. Considering that violence is one of the strategies media practitioners use to attract quick consumer attention, media many-a-times heavily focuses selectively on violence ignoring the serious social consequences such representation may have. As derived from the responses, the present scenario in India is that the media is there to grab easy attention and in the process what happens is just sensationalisation of purposively selected information.

It is already theoretically established that violence in media does not reflect violence in society in terms of magnitude and impact always. There are great deal more violence in media than in real life, portrayed unrealistically (Potter 2003: 211). As a result of constant exposure to media violence people tend to believe that the world is a far more violent place than it actually is. This psychological tension and stress is also found to depress specific group of users and results in physiological malfunctioning in the long run, but this area is left out of the thesis discussion.

### **5.2.2 Media Representation Analysis**

In the present scenario, it wouldn't be unfair to conclude that all types of media outlets cash on action scenario that is representation of violence. Reports involving incidents of violence appear daily in various modes of media, newspapers, internet, radio, television, etc. sometimes even with horrific graphic details of violence (Fourie 2010: 415). Beginning from the so called un-hazardous video games, derived play methods to cartoons with specific animated characterisations; all silently and subtly transmit violence into the society. Violent entertainment has entered every house and individuals through a button click can access it. No one is immune to media violence. It affects children, adolescents, adults and elderly. "Achieving greater age, experience, and cognitive ability does not shield people from negative effects; in fact these very characteristics may actually make adults more vulnerable to certain effects" (Potter 2003: 211). There can apparently be various hazardous consequences of this entertainment if proper prevention and safeguarding methods are not taken on time.

The media user is repeatedly exposed to violent media texts or group of texts, so much so that he no longer realizes the enormity of being violent in real life. Evidences suggest that repeated viewing desensitises consumers to screen violence, and further desensitise to violence in real life and further leads media consumers to themselves become violent. (Boyle 2005:11) Every society witnesses intermittent public outbursts around the impact of TV violence on children. There have been numerous studies carried on in different parts of the world trying to link childrens' behaviour and television violence viewing. But comparatively little contributions have been made on adult media consumers specifically in Indian context as media research has been very limited in media studies as a whole. As Shohini Ghosh in her essay *Sex, Violence and Spectatorship in India* elaborates "construction of children as copycats and passive victims of media violence displaces any complicated analysis of how they actually engage with television" (Mishra and Chandiramani 40). In similar lines though media violence and impact on media consumers in media representations have been popular discourses, studies have not attempted to reveal the actual extent of impact of violence representation in media.

The present study is an attempt to understand the media producer's intentions in communicating instances of violence in Assam. The responses derived identifies the dominant perceptions, intentions and responses of media practitioners from the region, along with the hidden factors that work behind reporting of purposive and selective instances of violence. In contrast to the media belief of strategic use of violence content forwarding commercial gains; it is perceived that the region is negatively being portrayed in the national canvas and beyond causing lot more harm to the society and people. This preset study in identifying the instrumental factors of negative representation of the region tries to counter the media representation practice forwarding the concept of peace journalism than war journalism in more solution oriented reporting rather than only facts and figures.

### **5.2.3 Northeast India: Prevailing Media Practice**

Coverage of violence appears to be motivated by profit margins, perceived populist appeal and often bends on the sensationalist representation. Some such coverage which have over time proved to be very well accepted and saleable as well as money-

making are report stories about acts of violence especially on innocent and vulnerable individuals or groups, human rights violations, and the failure of the relevant official bodies to address the matter or to deliver justice, sufferings and terror struck people. Responses confirmed the need to control negative imaging and the way Northeast is being represented and portrayed to the world outside the region through selective reporting of violence. People living outside these regions have a mediated and largely distorted picture of the region and the people. Over the ages the militancy angle, the unrest and the distressed people are the only focus of media in the northeast and also outside, in the mainstream media. And as these have become the only projected issues outside the region, even if the media is not providing the bias; most of the times the media is just stirring up the prejudices that lie deep within people. And undoubtedly the media coverage of some of the events in the Northeast raises worrying questions about objectivity and responsibility of the media.

In my personal experience as a journalist while working with a regional television news channel as a news producer, I happened to witness an act of exaggerated media representation to the extent of misreporting and unethical exaggerations. It was when another channel aired a story of collective violence with communal overtones, arson and villages burning; and numbered initial casualties as six. Our news reports were ordered by authorities to report casualties as nine, with an idea that this would place us ahead of the other channel which actually broke the story first. This was done predominantly to give viewers an impression that our media house gave away the latest, increased in numbers updated figures. In fact we in the media office had no information about the incident whatsoever and the stringer who was suppose to feed us the information woke up shocked to our enquires. Defending himself and his oblivion about the incident, and in fear of losing the job eventually; he landed up making a story which was nowhere near what was either was being projected by the first channel or to what had actually happened in the location. In reality, there was a little tiff among few men regarding a plot of land with casualties five with minor injuries (as per police officials' reports). Only the people fighting were of different religious identities but no communal violence had occurred. The story however was run for an entire day- six news bulletins in our channel and also others, without complains. There was no update or follow-up stories either or clarifications.

The media perspective in reporting violence exclusively and extensively from the region may be scrutinised under the ethical framework of “utilitarianism” to satisfy a majority of media consumers. Entire Northeast in the mainstream attitude is apparently marginalised. In this context media texts are designed in such a manner that they comply with the popular perceptions of the mainland media as well as mainland India. As established media representations do not reflect upon “whether or not it improved or corrected some social situations, or the welfare of certain individuals or disadvantaged groups...this formula for media practice privileges maximum pleasure and entertainment, and is also likely to be a high-ratings winner, even if it causes harm to certain people in the process” (Dwyer 12). Responses further conform the existing trend of representation of violence as media makers’ quantitative reporting of violence and alleged media trails and verdicts are less concerned about media consumers enlightenment or societal benefits but primarily focus on individualistic gains.

#### **5.2.4 Citations Clarifying the Conflict**

Some facts which never really get highlighted in media include positive news, services and scopes that the region has in contributing towards development of the nation as a whole. As per facts the northeast is important to India because it is rich in oil, tea, paddy, timber, water and minerals. Assam supplies about 25 per cent of India’s scarce indigenous oil. The massive Brahmaputra River flows through it and has carved out a large, fertile river valley. This is a classic case of a resource-rich sub-region dominated by a political heartland that is ethnically, and in many cases religiously, different. This perceived resource exploitation has even contributed to some of the separatist movements in recent years. But what is to be noticed is media seldom does portray the resources but rather focuses on the conflicts that the resources lead to at times. Thus it is essential to answer every myth and lie; encounter every wrong signal- emanating even from the governments’ wrong actions; and propaganda of the insurgents and the media supporting them in regard to the northeastern region. There is a need of an all out frontal intellectual war with a view to eliminating confusions and

haziness of ideas. The conscientious citizens, the civil society forums and the media should play a positive role (Kumara 2007: 44).

Experts even believe it is the media representations only which even led to further confusions and distrust among the people, leading to further conflicts. These are because of the population mix and the very high emotions that run through because of factors political and social (said by *Assam DGP Jayanta Choudhury in an interview on a national television channel*). This is what in turn gets reflected and reinforced in the media consumers as well far and wide.

As put forth by Chetan Bhagat in one of his articles talking about his own experiences of the region Northeast, most of the youth respondents also echo a similar point of view. There is a subtle appeal for attention and being taken as a part of India and not outsiders. And this neglected feeling is generated and reconfirmed by the media space and content. Northeast has been in the news for the wrong reasons, many in the region feels the same. But unfortunately the media is yet to accept the fact that northeast deserves a rightful place in the media map as well along with its place in other fields.

In realising what the media has been doing to the mindsets of the people outside the region this next instance is worth mention. "I expected to be greeted by guns and was sure of getting killed by a stray bullet" had reflected Smita Agnihotri, Deputy Financial Adviser of North East Frontier Railway talking about her initial fear of being transferred to Assam. An official of the Indian Railway Service, like many others, she had a stereotypical notion of the northeastern region. Later residing in the region and getting to know the actual scenario which was actually not so grim she later wrote in an online web article, people outside the region do tend to fearfully avoid the region and "it is because encouraging facets about the region never get discussed by the media". This distorted view is perpetrated by the media which reports more on discontent and militant activities, than the region's uniqueness.

Pamela Philipose, Guest Editor of an online portal *The Thumb Print*, feels that the media in the Northeast are important as they are the only means to hold up a

mirror to the region and reflect it to the world beyond, a unique story in itself which holds up a mirror to India and reflects the country's contradictions and strengths, the country's historical transgressions and future expectations. She states that it is essential to “challenge the way the largely Delhi-centric mainstream media defines India, decide news priorities and capture contemporary realities.”

### **5.3 Findings of the Study**

Based on the responses obtained, it was reconfirmed that news from the region with the basic motive of information communication, is mostly a glimpse of the actual (people, places or events) most of which is either unknown or unexplored reality; and rest is not represented in media except the sensational part which is only understood as being capable of attracting a large spectrum of varied audience far and across. Out of the respondents of various strata of the media industry, academicians and locals the consensus was on the way Northeast has been projected outside the region through violence only.

The northeastern region suffers from certain discrimination from the mainstream media, and only selective events get exposed to the world, while other facets of life in the region are ignored by media. Only conflicts get reported and the resultant loss in life and property receive media exposure. This results in strong prejudice formation and reinforcement through stereotypical representations for long now. Thus it is seen that its need to be studied and applied in practice so as to confirm and see to it that the existing media bias is broken and perceptions changed.

Like any other common daily used commodities, news presentation has become one of the necessary commodities of life today where violence is a common gimmick element designed to capture and hold viewers' attention. The media producers are quite often seen to concentrate on market audience research programmes to design media texts which result in homogeneity of products. Like any other product, information as news today is packaged, advertised and sold; and has become a part of an integrated market system, where profit making

appears to be the dominant market strategy incorporating sensationalising of violence. Competition for audience is severe, and for maximum exposure, highest sponsorship and extreme income all media houses package information in a way, using various eye catching techniques, of which sensationalising violence seems to top the list

There were sections among the respondents who pointed at the missed out representation in media of certain groups and more concentration on certain groups only. Respondents seemed to believe that the illegal Bangladeshi immigrants' issue related news dominated the media while others like the Adivasis of the region, the tea tribes, other indigenous tribes were people whose grievances were never addressed by the media, let alone the mainstream media the regional media also scarcely address their cause.

Media houses basically work in collaboration with local houses with exchange of stories. And because of these tie ups, i.e. the mainstream television channels take up only selective stories from respective regional channels and thus the Northeast gets projected in national media. Indeed no national media houses (television news channels or newspaper organisations) have correspondents in every state of the Northeastern region; most of the media houses have one correspondent for the whole region. It is absolutely impossible for one person to look into the happenings of the entire northeastern region comprising of seven states. Rest of the media houses looking for cost cutting in production, even get the work done by stringers, mostly a team of amateur cameraperson and a reporter, from various locations as and when required. Apparently there are instances where the on field journalists are non-experts of the covered beat, professionally untrained, neither well aware of the history nor knowledgeable about the entire situation. The reporting thus may be criticised of being based on superfluous understanding of figures and impact, only produced to meet the information demands of the head offices of the production industry.

Furthermore media houses work in collaboration with local houses with exchange of stories. In most cases in mainstream media, the final report of any incidence of violence from the region is only a re-packaged representation of news reports sent

from the regional media houses. As a result of these tie-ups, the mainstream media houses take up only selective stories from respective regional channels or newspapers and thus the Northeast gets projected in national media. The regional media houses in turn thrive to reproduce and represent only those selective facts from the region which they expect would be easily accepted by the mainstream media houses. As general consensus, it was found that violence which affects a large number of people is easily and instantly taken up by media houses. For the region is already branded as and known for only terror stricken, terror attacks by militant groups, ethnic clashes, etc are supposed to grab headlines. And thus stories of mass violence are given priority over any other kind of news no matter how important it may be in real terms. Developmental stories and other regional events are segregated as less saleable stories and thus are kept away from the lead stories in the regional media, the so called mainstream media fail to even give coverage to them.

A pan-national approach towards selecting content makes media representations miss out various other facets of the region, especially by the mainstream media (Kumar and Gaur: 2012 160 ). Apparently this is one of the primary reasons why violence finds dominance in media texts in regional media reports as media practitioners believe violence from the region is all the consumers are interested to know about. As opposed to this popular notion a survey conducted upon Delhi media consumers found the audiences' lamenting over lack of information and negative representations (160).

In the survey respondents were in consensus to media depicting the region as violent, unsafe and terror prone. Accepting that these negative stories have been on only because it does not defy the long existing trend the media experts believe violent representation has been projecting and propagating Northeast and Assam in particular, in negative light to the rest of the nation and beyond. As *The Times of India*, the national newspaper, which has a regional office at Guwahati and a Guwahati edition of its paper, has its motto "give people what they want to read" same goes for all the other media houses too.

The objective of media ideally is to inform people, not create prejudices and stereotypes; neither to provide tainted views to its consumers' thought only partial projections; and also not to confirm and reconfirm notions. So if Northeast has been branded wrongly and has been brought to limelight, though in less than expected number of times, for all the inappropriate and negative reasons the status quo needs to be changed. Media practitioners (all who were surveyed) believe that media has the potential to do so.

But when asked to practically stop practicing the same and stop representing violence and selling violence through their media products, there came a very different response from what they strongly believe. For the media houses and individual media person comes in the question of survival. As said by one of the respondents "*If we don't they will, we need to survive, and not only survive but lead the competition*". And thus does not end the vicious circle of representation of violence in the region and of the region; thus the commercialisation of news exists to rule the media content.

It appears to be very difficult to change the commercial attitude of the media makers of the region who bank upon unrestful happenings of the region, expand and express selective information, blowing out of proportion just to be a part of the competition and win the *headlines* or *breaking news* slot. Most of the regional media houses not only aim at their own TRPs (Television Rating Points) but also answer to the requirements of the mainstream media houses based far away from the region. While the decision makers in most of the media houses (national or regional) are quite away from the ground realities in not personally being present at the event and also not identifying with the prevalent circumstances, they lack understanding and awareness of the place and events, but they are the ones who decide and design the media content. The ones on field have less control over the final product that comes out. All that matters is the saleable value of the information like any other product in market.

For the people of rest of the country and beyond the only way to know what the place and people are like, is through various channels of media. But national media or mainstream media do not portray the region much in them. Only violence, insurgency related stories are considered and preferred. Media coverage of the region, in a way

creates such an illusion that there is nothing other than violence happening in the state. A lot of research work has been done on impact of media violence on people outside media, the consumers of media. And how violence on screen affects violence in real, but less of work has been done on what exactly goes behind the prevailing system. What is being represented and why? And how much of the representations are authenticated, and if in the affirmative, is there nothing beyond these representations that can define a place, event or people of a particular region as their aspirations?

One specific example can be cited of a noted editor of a regional newspaper, and former Bureau Chief of a national television channel veteran journalist from northeast, in his writings and interview strongly criticises the *mainstream attitude* of the media makers, with less awareness of the region the real northeast issues are not at all carried in mainstream media. Another opinion is of a senior journalist and Managing Editor of a television news channel based in Guwahati, who also said that mainstream media only wants violence and crimes story from the northeast and that most media makers at the top have no idea what the place is like.

The above views have also been reflected in Singh's work (1998:146-147), apart from its professional obligation and business compulsions aiming at conflict and conflict resolution, media in Northeast must play a special role. The region straddled by atleast four foreign countries, Bhutan, Tibetan China, Myanmar and Bangladesh and ravaged by violent armed activities, deserves more attention and understanding on the part of media. Thus research on media where people's aspirations are reflected, assumes great significance. As Nalin Mehta states, India's private television industry has grown at a furious pace but the task of unearthing its social impact has barely begun (Mehta 2008b: 56).

The entire North-east region has approximately 4.15 million cable and satellite homes. As per 2011 reports, there are about 626 channels on air in India, of which approximately 312 are news channels, and 314 are non-news channels, which have enormously in the past year. The government has granted up-linking permission to about 75 channels and has received application for 29 new channels between July 2010 and January 2011 (Chrome NE). This gives an overview of reach and

penetration of media, mainstream as well as local in the region, in the region as well as from the region. It is a serious concern that with the media of the region is potential enough to make or mar the image of the region in the region as well as in front of the outside world.

Drawing parallel between Glassner's awareness about the "promotion of fear of drugs" (Glassner 2009: 302 ) that is expected to prevent further damage of the society; reflecting upon the representation of nature and purposes of culture of fear, the violence representation of the region in media may also be viewed and questioned. In what ways and in what degree is the promotion of fear of violence in the region promoted by media. In what ways have sensationalism and misinformation guided the media discussion (national and regional) about violence in the region. And in the process of magnifying violence what aspects of the region and people have been neglected by the media also needs to be answered.

The dominance of media representations in shaping up the understanding and perceptions of people across a wider section of media audiences may be seen as an adequate explanation of 'media hegemony'. Various forms of media, especially electronic media are subliminal in such a manner that those who are being influenced by the content are unaware of the true source of that influence (Schwartz 1983: 46). All media products appear to be designed with clever marketing tactics that tend to inculcate a complete thought process into their consumers and thus manufacture public opinion and popular trends. But in concluding so, knowledge and intensions of the news producers often are kept out of consideration. Moreover the nature and extent of news also depends a lot on the prevailing media trends and the competitive market scenario.

Even though growth of media industry and rise of journalism schools in the region has opened up professional avenues for aspiring journalists, women participation has increased in numbers only in the regional as well as national media industry. With very selective women visible in the profession media industry far and wide remains the domain of men especially in respect to serious journalism or hard news.

It was derived from the responses that *Doordarshan News* and the private news channels operating in the area work on fundamentally different assumptions completely. In a television research agency survey in 2009, it was found that *Doordarshan* commands the highest channel share along with greater number of viewers as compared to the private networks (Sinha 2009). It is evident that reach of *Doordarshan* in the rural areas as well is what claims the maximum coverage and viewership, whereas the urban population seems to be drawn to the polished packaging of news of the private news channels. As the study (Sinha 2009) revealed “*Doordarshan* and its two-dozen channels do not attract more than Rs 500 crore in advertising revenue in a year compared to nearly Rs 4,500 crore generated on private channels”; perhaps revenue generation not topping the list of objectives may be said to be the primary reason why the content and quality of *Doordarshan* does not seem commercialised and ideology driven to some extent. Apparently the maximum coverage of all Northeastern states in form of documentaries and various other programmes is regularly done by *Doordarshan* only. *Doordarshan News* or DD News, as per respondents from the media house does not concentrate on marketing strategies or follow the ‘herd mentality’ in reporting of events from the region. Thus violence also does not fall under the priority content of the media house. In regard to reporting of violence incidents, DD News primarily broadcast from Delhi allots slots for the Regional News Units for coverages. As a respondent’s from the house says it well “DD coverages of violence are mature, we do not repeat unwanted footages over and over again to scare people. The intention in to inform and not create panic.” This approach towards media representation with specific reference to reporting of violence requires to be achieved to avoid negative unfavourable reporting of the region in media.

In concluding remark the following inferences may be said to arise from the study:

1. Media commercialisation has lead to producers concentrate on market audience research programmes to design media texts which often results in homogeneity of products.
2. It was also confirmed that as stereotypical projection of late has been neglecting many other facets of reality, the role of media in specific

reference to Northeast and Assam requires to be re-looked into for proper projection.

3. It is a concern today that if media disposes enough responsibility that comes with the immense power, to handle serious social issues, to take human emotion further to social development without hurting sentiments and not enraging people.
4. **Points that emerge from interviews and gathered views**
  - A majority of the respondents do show a serious concerns in the way Assam has been and is being represented in media in the state and as well as outside the state.
  - Commercialisation is a factor for which media content has been stereotypical.
  - The region only gets attention and space in media when a large number of people are affected usually by violence or by flood.
  - Geographical location makes the region out of reach and proximity area of the so called mainstream media organisations which makes authentication, validation, and understanding difficult along with negligence and lesser knowledge.
  - There are norms which media houses need to follow regarding representation of violence in media, but is less maintained.
  - The print media still has certain control on its content of violence, for direct depiction of violence usually images are selected over a span of time.
  - In case of television media, there is no thumb rule for direct representation of violence. Most of the time acts of violence are telecasted under the 'LIVE' tag with no scope for selection or editing of footages.
  - Other aspects of the region are never brought up in media.

It may be assumed that before the situation aggravates beyond control, the media in Northeast India and also the mainstream media, must take adequate steps to reduce violence in its content. And it is possible by expressing the concern that should not only be what is being projected but also on how it is being projected. The concentration has been on bringing the region to the headlines, and headlines are grabbed only with violence is the understanding.

The real sharing of people's aspiration and the self motivation to achieve shall reflect in controlling the frustration relevances.

## **5.4 Salient features of the Study**

### **Selective and purposive reporting of collective violence**

In this thesis, an attempt was made in determining which features of Assam in particular grab more media attention at the regional as well as the mainstream level and why. The study based primarily on the central assumption- media representations broadly focuses on selective and purposive reporting of collective violence in Assam, a scenario that holds true for the entire northeastern region as well. As news reporting is primarily driven by perceived interests of the prospective media consumers; a lot also depends upon the access of media makers to information to deliver such popular, well accepted, attractive stories. It is noteworthy that in manufacturing desired media products, personal ideologies, media houses' affiliations and authoritative pressure play equally significant role in determining content and context of representation.

The main derivative of the thesis in understanding the media makers of the region, their perception of representation with specific reference to violence reporting, is to identify and rectify patterned projection of the region in media.

### **Representation strengthening negative perception**

Content analyses proves that media text on and from the Northeast mostly tend to define the region as per the saleable value of news content which reinforce the prejudiced perceptions leading to even stronger perception creation. Survey of producer's intentions in communicating certain social violence in Northeastern part of India, and receiver's perception creation as per acceptance of the information through representation in media was carried out. It is observed that shocking open ended information of direct violence images and visuals create uneasiness and insecurity leading to psycho-physiological stress, anxiety and trauma in people. And thus this also raises opportunity of context specific detailed study on the effects of media violence on specified end user groups and also on the producers as well. To get audience attention, it may have positive or negative impact, media many-a-times

heavily focuses violence; and this may be seen seriously with its social consequences and ergonomic issues.

### **Popular industry belief**

Another peculiar aspect of news reports from the region was that the media often portrays the incident of violent as acts and situations with facts and figures, but rarely does it do the follow-up stories that focus on the consequences of violence. Impact of violence is only shown as human victimisation. Life coming back to normalcy in affected areas is apparently never a part of media content. The probable explanation for media being so selective and limited about violence reporting from the region, especially television news with rarely reporting on the consequences of violence may be attributed to be the popular industry belief that audiences prefer only such stories.

### **Stereotypical projection**

In media especially news reporting, media practitioners have their own criteria for judging what is worth covering and in what magnitude. There are also ways of judging how much of the covered is worth representing, in what format and with how much intensity. To acquire maximum consumer attention and thus forward commercial gains, media needs to frame the issues in appealing ways. The media like stories with conflict, human interest, novelty, or superlatives is already established as apparent stereotypical projection rules the media world.

### **Decision maker's representational choice**

In words of a respondent “coverage of Northeast India is almost similar to the way the First World media covers the third world”. Also good number of research suggests that the pattern of representation of Whites and non-Whites in media send strong messages across the audiences. While characters of colour are usually either invisible or are projected in stereotypical negative roles, perpetrators and lawbreakers; Whites are generally portrayed as victims (Evra 116). Similarities may be drawn between such representation patter being followed by the regional as well as mainstream media in marginalising the region as a whole. As Arijit Sen figures out “between the lack of interest of the national media and the lack of objectivity- or at times powerlessness- of the regional media, reporting in the region has become insignificant. The region

remains a media ‘Black Hole’.”(99). It is derived that freedom completely lies in the hands of the media makers’ and it apparently is their prerogative to mention any detail or leave out on selective contexts while filing their story. To at all carry it in news bulletins and newspapers or not again lies the choice of the decision makers of the media industry.

### **Occupational stress and negativism**

Responses have confirmed that here is a constant pressure for the journalists to focus and highlight on stories of violence and unrest, which are in tune with the popular perception and popular culture of news consumerism of the state and outside, where the mainstream thrives for negative portrayal. The mental pressure to work against their will is also very high. Every individual journalist when confronted regrets the state in which the region is being and has been projected in the media for the people to know it as an unrest and violent place, unliveable with violence happenings being a part of life here. Most of the journalists working on field, especially the locals working in their own home region, do not like to represent Northeast in and through violent light. But they are either forced to do so or have less of choice. In practice everyone follows the unsaid practice of following the popular culture reinforcing the prejudices and stereotypes about the region. This mental stress and anxiety apparently affects the working and productivity of the journalists in long run.

Furthermore with specific reference to Northeast work environment for media practitioners, a known fact is the working conditions are very harsh. Responses even made clear that the safety measures are equally less for working journalists. As per the South Asia Media Monitor 2012 report, Jammu and Kashmir, Jharkhand and Northeast are the conflict zones in the whole of India where “media persons were targeted by non-state actors, enjoying support of extremist elements” (Panneerselvan 51). Distinctively “threats of murder and death sentences in the northeast and conflicting pressures from militants and official agencies elsewhere made their jobs extremely difficult” (51) further states the report. Statistics reveal that in the last 24 years, 23 journalists have been killed or have gone missing from Assam only, mentioned a respondent- leading columnist associated with *The Indian Express*. Tremendous work load, low returns in terms of salary and other legitimate facilities

and ongoing unrest in the region puts tremendous challenges to the working journalists; making the work field increasingly dangerous is the subjection to numerous threats from insurgents, surrendered militants and even the anti-insurgent security personnel at times. Despite a phenomenal growth in the media, journalists have to put up with poor wages and working conditions, and the hazards of working in a troubled state.

In respect to reporting of violence in Assam (generally clubbed into northeast as a whole and not as an individual state by respondents from the media industry and outside) there are two specific instances. One where the northeast as a whole goes unreported and the other is only information representing violence in the region (authenticated as well as misreported) gets projected as news. Moreover with the mainstream accepting reports of violence and the only way to showcase credibility and appreciation is to lead up to the mainstream expectations, the pressure on media practitioners retain focus on stories of violence and unrest is extremely high. The mental pressure to work against their will is also found to be equally high working under refrains meeting deadlines. Every individual journalist when confronted regrets the state in which the region is being and has been projected in the media for the people to know it as an unrest and violent place, unliveable with violence happenings being a part of life here. Most of the journalists working on field, especially the locals working in their own home region, do not like to represent Northeast in and through violent light. But they are either forced to do so or have less of choice. In practice everyone follows the unsaid practice of following the popular culture reinforcing the prejudices and stereotypes about the region. Whereas the violent media representation is mainly due to the media houses' sale concerns, the compromise seems to be on other sentiments.

### **Purposive content for business profit**

Though it seems commendable to a very limited number of respondents, that media outlets are proactive in this regard of reporting on this marginalised piece of land. By taking seriously the objective of communicating such happenings to the public, they claim to create some pressure on the state apparatus to address the matter with urgency and also to hold the perpetrators of the violence accountable for their actions.

This is what is supposed to be the job of the media actually, but in doing so what is most of the time unintentionally ignored or neglected intentionally is the fact that most of the stories are often incomplete in information and are based on sketchy details to begin with and limited or improper research. And most of such stories are done, published, aired or hosted to serve certain purpose, which certainly is not meant for the society (William 2008). And thus as also subsequently forgotten in a day or two, as soon as the job is done, damage done, faiths shaken or disturbance created; the content sales primary to business profit.

### **Partisan role of media**

The region specific extensive stereotypes representation of violence may be speculated as the consequence of strong political influence over media as well. As already established media constructed “aesthetics of terror” biased and stereotyped have lead to question the “violent political means and exclusive identities thereby promoting the growth of civil society in the region” (Hasan 2009); it is derived in the study that the unrestful image of the state, Assam in particular, is used for furthering politically charged individualistic aspiration. On the other hand media ownership also is significant enough in deciding media texts. It is apparent that most regional media houses are owned by the elite section of the society. In case of Assam it is the local “Assamese” elite. Also the decision making powers of the media houses’ belong to the same class and section of society with very limited access provided to the marginalised sections and the minorities. This leads to an immensely partisan role within the media as well as reflected in media texts, of strengthening and spreading stereotypes and inappropriate perception among media consumers. Journalism in practice has fundamentally been serving one’s own people, may it be a particular social class, community, race, religion, nation or any such factor that distinguishes a particular group from the ‘others’; these acknowledgements and affiliations are often reflected in media texts as media bias and strengthen stereotypes. Furthermore there is constant endeavour to maintain the existing patterns through media representations that reinforce the dominant ideologies so that the constructed reality does not challenge the existing perceptions of the consumers.

### **Lack of trained reporters**

Another noteworthy mention is the hierarchy pattern and background of the media practitioners of the region. In usual practice most decision makers in media houses of Assam are senior journalists, most in their mid-fifties by age with no formal media education and training but work experience in journalism. Institutions departing media education formally have been set up in the late 90s in the region with Tezpur University and Assam University departing formal education in mass communication and journalism since 2001 and 1996 respectively. Thus journalistic practices in the region apparently had begun without professionally trained personnel. Now though various private institutions offering courses in journalism have mushroomed in the region their credibility remains yet to be tested. And with the media industry growing, the media houses have been rampantly hiring professionals without formal professional training. As a freelance journalist is seen expressing her concern about lack of “specialist reporters in the region, while most media personnel are untrained and underpaid” (Sen 99). Even Sanjoy Hazarika identifies the gap as though “Northeastern faces are easily recognisable among media crews, fashion industry and in media... but few have received professional counselling in conflict-ridden areas such as Nagaland, Manipur, Assam and Tripura” (2000: 106). This only aggravates the situation of unprofessional media practices in the region. There is also negligible local representation at the mainstream media, especially in powerful positions, so as to rectify misunderstandings, misrepresentations and bring to fore issues other than violence in the mainstream consciousness.

### **Media freedom verses social responsibility**

Many allege ownership patterns of the media houses disrupt in media freedom. And also the concept of “paid news” where news manufacturing turns out to be a pre-ordered product with provided specifications seems to be rampant in media industry. In Assam while majority of the media houses are directly owned by politicians or former extremist members, a strong ideological inclination can be seen in most media houses functionalities. In addition questions on compromising media ethics are often raised in churning out desired and preordained media texts. Apprehensions regarding opting for journalistic ethics, freedom of speech and expression, social responsibility and commercialisation is intense in the media practitioners. To thrive in presently

evolving media environment, individual journalists and organisations as a whole need to inculcate efficiency with innovation; adopting innovative approaches to content selection and development, processing, distribution and technology along with commercial gains and social responsibility. Reporting or media representation falls under the periphery of communication design. Design is considered to be the process of changing current situation to a preferred one. In this context, it needs to be addressed that if at all violence representation in media is performing towards the goal of betterment of the society or towards self promotion.

### **Consumers shift from traditional media captivity to multi-source information**

Apparently monotonous consistency, homogenous products and offensive stereotypes in media representations, in approaches towards content, production and technology, needs to be challenged. A major element of studying representations also focuses on the consumers as to how they receive, consume and react to the media constructed realities. Media consumers are seen demanding more accountability, relevance and interactivity; stereotypical projection and perception patterns created and furthered by media are being questioned, suspected and objected. Apparently the residents of the region both living in the region and those settled out of the region have started to express displeasure in the representation patterns and thus have felt the need for change of persisting perception and the role of media. There have been studies which show media consumers beyond the region are equally interested to know about the region but are suffering from a communication gap and information gap. This may be seen as the primary reason why media consumers have started to shift towards the social media and internet and avail more avenues of news presentation. A section of media consumers' have been found discarding traditional news media- television news channels and newspapers, or additionally exploring the social media and internet looking for validation and interaction. This shows audiences prefer multi-platform news over information from single sources of news media.

Discarding the media effects model which describes media audiences as passive and uncritical, and accepts the audience groups respond to same material in the same way; the study come in conformation to the idea of an active audience.

### **Innovative experimentations against violence representation practice**

As for Stuart Hall meanings are generated through representations done by individuals or groups (Hall 1997: 155). And according to his model of encoding and decoding, the intended meaning of a text as encoded by the producer may be way different from the perceived message by the consumer upon decoding the media texts. Thus extending the concept of an active audience still further comes in the Reception Theory of media. It becomes equally crucial to understand how the consumers of media interpret media texts (Fourie 2001: 244). The process of interpretation in this context is defined as the process of negotiation between media texts and media consumers “situated within specific social and cultural contexts.” (245). As studies reveal as against the popular perception of audiences beyond the region not interested in news from Northeast and violence and conflicts is all they want to know in stories and follow-up stories, media consumers are actually open to experimentations and welcoming to news from the region other than violence. Though the traditional mainstream media is found to ignore such revelations and carry on with customary representations, it is seen that some individual media houses and individual journalists are considering the importance of consumers’ feedback. Apparently efforts are seen being made by mostly non-profit initiatives like *Jeevan Magazine*, *Eclectic Northeast* and *The Thumb Print: A magazine from the East* to deviate from the presiding norms of media representation with focus on violence, conflict and distress only; and are attempting to portray the region in better way, adverse to the popular beliefs of the region.

### **Unconventional representation for inclusive reporting**

As earlier researches reveal all constructed identities of the region are invariably in relation to the so called “Indian mainstream” where Northeast apparently is presented as the ‘sub-stream’ or ‘side-stream’ (Karna 2008: 19). In this regard the present study found that few respondents problematised the term “mainstream” and rejected Assam or Northeast being the sub-stream or the side-stream as against the distant mainstream. As a regional journalist proclaims “coverage of news is mostly city centric and this happens in every region. Being situated in the peripheral location it is bound to happen. Here is where media persons’ responsibilities come into being. Their ability to cover inclusively and report on each and every aspect becomes

important.” This in a way implies that in order to change the so called mainstream attitude towards the region, media representation need to be relooked into, beyond the existing patterned reporting of violence. Thus raises need for media practitioners to focus on non-local and unconventional objectives, and practice inclusive reporting.

### **5.5 Northeast Work Documentation Efforts**

With the above understanding, this thesis specifically intends to mention two such cases that can be a model for media attention and scholarly study. It cites a recent project undergoing at IIT Guwahati on cultural and Indian literary works that prevails as traditional treasure in Northeast that is being attempted to make digital preservation and easy sharing. Major objectives of this effort are preserving the cultural heritage of Northeast India and promoting it to the generations and to the world as well.

The second area is Indian classical dance and media with specific reference, traditional classical the youth think is not “cool” as said by a Bharatnattiyam exponent in a *SPIC MACAY* concert on 1<sup>st</sup> Nov 2010 in IIT Guwahati campus. It raises a concern about the role of media and Indian ethos. A specific space in media may be created for pride propagation of Indianness more specifically among Indians as well as showcasing before outsiders. Culturally we have gone very close to imitate the western; but is it not only the westernisation factor that causes in us, specifically the youth, the tendency to even disrespect our own traditions and cultures and age-old aesthetics perception. In this context, generations may have individual attitude towards life, what would be the role of media towards maintaining an effective balance.

It is seen that regional news to get wider acceptance, quite often projects only the shocking instances of violence, which has the potential to grab quick attention of the audiences; and with kind of event specific coverage the real image about a location or society gets negative impact among a wider audience. As for example, inappropriate reporting of social evils with direct images and footages, does not propagate stability, instead it creates fear among the masses and in a way also seems to be encouraging ill deeds doers. Elements responsible to make effective media communication to motivate people in a positive manner may be a specific area of study in media studies

with specific reference to India- a typical context of multi-cultural heterogenic harmonious society with great variations in the production groups as well as audience groups.

With power comes great responsibility; and undoubtedly media possesses immense power to rein on public; create public opinions perceptions faiths and beliefs. Does it dispose enough responsibility to handle serious social issues to take human emotion further to social development without hurting sentiments and not enraging people; thus it becomes important to study the effectiveness and appropriateness in the representations in media so that they encourage positive image building.

Western domination, as it started aiming at social revolution, prevails in our communication system; we have followed the basic structure developed by them and then developed or elaborated on that and many aspects of our culture and tradition have been disremembered in favour of western influences. They also confront the limitations of conventional theories on media and globalisation in understanding these relationships. But what we seem to have overlooked so far is the thought that going global requires retention of one's own identity and pride.

In this effect, India is trying to showcase its culture to others, where as within country we are yet to honour our own traditional good practices. This with media's easy access can play a great role. Some Indian media sectors are investing on retelling Indian history and ethos to young minds, demystifying western understanding of our traditions in innovative ways. Media can well frame the honour of Indianness. Need today is to focus on the media representation of events and information in tune to the required public perception of looking for wellbeing.

Just as it seems traditions have gone 'out of fashion', but it is seen that media has been effective in inculcating certain traditional beliefs and thoughts amongst its audiences. Infrastructure and the influences mass media has brought along with it has created a culture where person to person interaction has nearly stopped. Information is relayed to us through media channels like radio, television, books and newspapers. It seems almost as if we have entered an era of 'cognitive imperialism'. Modern media

theories are taken from outside, but India context differs; it concerns to document 'reference materials' for researching on Indian media issues.

Contemporary media studies includes the analysis of new media with emphasis on the internet, video games, mobile devices, interactive television, and other forms of mass media which developed from the 1990s. Because these new technologies allow instant communication across the world (chat rooms and instant messaging, online video games, video conferencing), interpersonal communication is also an important element in new media studies. And so keeping this in mind efforts can be put on traditional Indian communication systems using modern technology benefits.

There are certain misrepresentations in popular media, for example the way Indians are represented; Indian cultures and Indian ethos etc are put forward the world to see, understand and create their own perceptions. For instance, even today India is understood as the nation of snake charmers, colourful festivals and poor uneducated lot; and this has been due to certain kind of reserved representations in media of India. What representations are made in the national and international media are actually creating perceptions regarding our own cultures, traditions, people and the society at large. Therefore the way the nation is being presented worldwide and the related perception creation is also a contribution of the media, not only in regional and national media but also overseas. And of course India is not only land of snake charmers, colourful festivals and poor uneducated lot. Let's talk about the northeastern region of India. It is not only about bomb blasts, terrorism, infiltration and tribes, as it is widely understood to be. But content analysis of new media products, national or international media or even regional as well proves it that news and other media product on Northeast defines Northeast India as only these.

The present scenario in India is that that media is there to grab easy attention and in the process what happens is just sensationalisation of information. To information there is no value addition instead there is manipulation to it and further there is breaking of the information and according to the wants of the governing and controlling bodies the information is either partially hidden or partially exposed and of course with certain political or apolitical intentions. Quite often people mention

their preference of print over Television, as many a times it repeats images that horrifies them. It is usually fear of living that is being projected. “The earth is not that bad a place to live in... why so much of negativism then in media” as a respondent had expressed talking about excessive media violence. Cannot the media project the earth as a better place to be lived in without scaring audiences regarding all the happenings on earth from terrorism to global warming, inflation to price rise.

Good works are going on in Indian soil and mind; yester years youth are today's elderly who wish to see that the world they are leaving behind is liveable for next generations; can media project the feeling of trustworthy positive, what would be the representation means and methods needs to be figured out. Rather than following the western influenced theories or elaborating upon them to fit into Indian context, would it be feasible to develop newer avenues of Indianness in projecting images to serve trust, even our mythology expresses ‘win over evil’ to give positive attitude to life rather than blindly concentration on commercial gains and negativity.

## **5.6 Consequence and Relevance**

There has been considerable amount of academic research carried on in the field, regarding violent media content, impact of media violence on consumers, media violence evaluation and improving practices, but the question prevails, if all the researches, findings, discussions and recommendations on media violence and have changed the actual journalistic scenario and the process of violence representation in media. There has been significant academic work on media and Northeast though scant. Most of them identify the region to be neglected by the mainstream media and fault the violence oriented reporting pattern much in accordance with available literature. In the thesis survey, respondents were in consensus to media depicting the state of Assam and the whole of Northeast in general terms as violent, unsafe and terror prone. Apparently coverage of violence that often is criticised of inappropriate representations of instances of violence seem to be motivated by the profit margin. These negative stories of explicit reports on violence have been on only because it does not defy the long existing trend and practice. Some such coverage which have over time proved to be very well accepted and saleable as well as money-making are report stories about acts of violence especially on innocent and vulnerable individuals

or groups, human rights violations, and the failure of the relevant official bodies to address the matter or to deliver justice, sufferings and terror struck people.

As a critical approach to media representations this thesis is an attempt to figure out how stories about conflicts from the region are framed and what intensions of the media makers work behind the patterned media representations. It may be said that two strong driving forces of media production, deciding upon content and representation boils down to primarily two concepts- media commercialisation and dominant ideology. According to Marxist philosophy institutions and culture of a society are widely disseminated through by dominant ideology which provides the key institutions and values of the society with an appearance of naturalness and inevitability. In similar light the media scenario may be deciphered in terms of media content being the reflected ideologies of the dominant class- the elites and the decision makers of the industry. Whereas the understanding of ideology may be traced back to the works of Marx (Marx and Engels), there have been other influential factors as well at play in deciding media representations. Confirming the theory of News Framing and the dominant hegemonic perspective is the fact that media, local as well as mainstream, is found to select content and context of reporting, construct representations considering demands and popular beliefs of the dominant section of society. As widely understood in India most mainstream media houses are either controlled by (if not directly owned) the large political party at power or by the opposition at the centre, reflecting either groups' popular ideology or propaganda through definitive media representations. Moreover in respect to violence from the northeastern region making to the mainstream media, reports often are given strong political connotations. This may also be seen as a likely explanation from the media point of view of the peace efforts not extensively covered by mainstream media instead focusing on reporting of violence.

The rapid growing media industry in India has contributed considerably less to the coverage of so called "non-mainstream" regions and issues that apparently are unnoticed, under-represented, mis-represented or fabricated by media. Assam has by large been considered only a part of the entire northeast along with the other seven states and has never enjoyed that separate entity in media and national consciousness.

The mainstream national media, based in the metropolitan cities of the nation, with its understanding of news values and newsworthiness has required drastic events with massive figures from the region to make it to the news space and time. The most common easily accepted representation in media of the region has been media reports on incidents of violence- conflicts, massacres, ethnic clashes and insurgency largely; followed by natural calamity, politics, corruption and gender related violence. Other issues usually do not make it to the mainstream and resultantly remains missing from the public awareness. The regional media with proliferation of 24 hours news and current affairs channels, newspapers and current affairs news magazines over the past decade has failed to bring to notice of the global audience the accepted peripheral region, the Northeast as a whole and desired representation. Moreover the regional media houses thrive to serve to the demands of the national mainstream media houses' with wider reach and influence, to promote organisational and commercial motives, leaving aside the social responsibility of media.

There are two distinctive view gathered about representation of Assam in media. Firstly the one that states Assam has managed little to gain media attention and reach the public consciousness. Second, it requires being a huge massacre like the one of the gruesome killings in Nellie (see Image 11) to qualify to gain worldwide media attention (Baruah 1999: 132) which left nearly 3000 dead. Similarly Assam figures in cover story of an international current affairs magazine with the violence termed as "India's Biggest Human Tragedy" (see Image 12). Another view emerging of late through comparison of various other representation patters of similar incidents of violence in other places has been a combination of the two, which states that even though violence of higher decree manages to grab media attention and reaches a wider section of audiences though electronic and print media, there remains the gap between ground realities and the represented realities in news reports. And whatever is being represented in media is short lived and purely specific to time and context. Even tremendous political and social turmoils in Assam have seldom been part of national or international news. The aloofness of the international media towards the secluded northeast region of India, particularly the state of Assam, can be substantiated reviewing the manner in which the 1983 riot- 'Nellie Massacre' was represented. "One of the worst cases of religious-ethnic cleansing in independent India" (Rehman

2009) had claimed the lives of more than twice the number of people who died during the Godhra 2002 riots (S. Kumar). But in contrast to the media attention received by Gujarat riots in 2002 or the 1984 anti-Sikhs riots, the Nellie Massacre is a lesser known story.

Citing a *New Republic's* (a Western metropolis newspaper) news story, Baruah (1999) states, that a massacre, killing more than two thousand people in Assam, had suddenly made it to international headlines in 1983. The International newspaper editorial though was not well informed about the circumstances of the violence it confirmed that the violence in Assam revealed “something about political conditions in the “third world”. News of Assam’s massacres were projected as “events occurring in a remote corner of the world that constitutes modernity’s other” (Baruah 1999: xxi). Something of this magnitude was needed to make it to international headlines though it lacked proper knowledge, understanding and representation. On the other hands in national scenario, primarily media and political interventions can be said to be responsible for keeping silent and completely overlooking the incident thereafter.

In understanding the effectiveness of media communication to represent real Assam through its saleable contents as perceived by selective media experts and local residents, it was found from the opinion survey that the prevalent system of representing the region in media is through a predetermined representation method of sensationalising violence. Views gathered on media violence pointed at the necessity of media being consensus towards images of violence projecting the state of the region to a broader world. Though in practice the role of mediation of news was found to be that of production of a commodity for mass consumption with exceptional preference to violence from the region; in contrast to the rein of media violence some media practitioners also emphasis on the need of positive imaginisation as further exploration for the media industry.

This prevailing media scenario of patterned media reporting of violence in Assam may be scrutinised under Johan Galtung’s models of news framing: War and Peace journalism. The prevalent practice confirms the conflict oriented model of War Journalism being followed as against the solution oriented model as in Peace

Journalism. Media representations with reference to reporting of selective instances of violence in Assam may be attributed to media commercialisation. The patterned representation of the region through preordained portrayal of people associated with violence may be attributed to the TRP/circulation hungry media in the highly profit-oriented media industry. So much so that apparently media also is condemned of being insensitive to the mass sufferings, in its glorification and sensationalising of violent instances from the region and unobstructed reality constructions. As derived from responses and literature the regional and the mainstream media while working in collaboration often tend to highlight ethnicity issues while dealing with violence. In all reports of violence from the region the media intensely tries to identify the victim and the perpetrator. All representations are preordained in attempt to glorify the conflict, sympathise with victims and blames the perpetrators. Taking Galtung's Journalism model as the fundamental concept in understanding media representations of violence, it is found that the representations are more propaganda-oriented. Media apparently uses exaggerated, fabricated and unauthenticated facts and figures in media products to achieve the illicit objectives (Khan and Shakir). Whereas on the other hand in contrast to furthering conflicts with misrepresentations the desired media functioning would be based on the Peace Journalism model, concentrating on seeking solutions without hurting the sentiments of the people and hampering the image of the society.

Northeast as an entire region which has been experiencing life through reigns of terror also apparently is a place of equally dangerous work environment and experiences for journalists covering such incidents and issues of conflict and violence. Dangers of practicing journalism as it is in a volatile region are though well known is less attended to. And work load and work environment as against constant pressure of commercialisation has been disturbing factors for practicing free and fair journalism in the region. Respondents apparently agree constant are usually pressure being levied upon by the state authorities, the extremist outfits and the popular public demand. Under these circumstances the media practitioners come under scrutiny for providing the public with patterned projection of the region which in most cases is against their own perceptions and desires. Under pressure and competition there are also abundant reported cases of "laxity in professionalism in rush to achieve accuracy" (South Asia

Media Monitor) and maintain the desired target of delivery. Moreover with the growing media industry in the region amateur journalists are seen contributing towards conflict reporting as a result factual accuracy or social relevance are often compromised in media representations.

With marketisation of news, and constant patterned representation of violence from and of the region, news from Northeast has become more of a negatively advertised product, where the reality is apparently very dissimilar to the propagation. TRPs for television news channels and circulation for newspapers have been responsible for whole of the design and content of the media. For Northeast few factors that have worked adversely for the region and the prevalent media scenario is its location, far away from the mainland India, its insignificant and neglected existence, out of reach, out of communicable area to sell media products. Not changing the scenario now means accommodating and accepting the branding of the region as violent and insurgency prone. And that also means turning blind eyes to thousands of other issues which are more important and significant, which truly reflect the place and its people. It is the media “gatekeepers” who decide upon what media consumers are to see, hear or read. The Media Agenda Setting Theory (McCombs and Shaw) can be seen to be in effect here with the news media placing certain information in news stories; emphasising and highlighting some providing *Headline* space or *Prime time* slots, and intentionally keeping the media consumers ignorant on other decisively decided fronts. Prejudiced editorial decisions and selective media attention in reporting violence from Assam substantially contributes towards the perception among news consumers to believe the patterned representations as reality and thus media agenda helps dictate the agenda to the consumers as well (McCombs and Shaw, 1972). Agenda Setting theory suggests that though media’s role through representations and reporting of violence has not been an active attempt to persuade and influence the audiences about the region, media consumers still uses the media reports of violence as yardstick to evaluate the state of Assam.

It may be said that Stuart Hall’s interpretation of representations as organised systems deployed by social classes and other dominant groups “in order to make sense of, figure out and render intelligible the way society works” (1997: 26) remains true for

the present media scenario. Apparently people in control of media productions through their selective representation directly or indirectly dictate attitudes, behaviour and perceptions to the media consumers. As revealed in this study through selective reporting of violence the region is being constantly marginalised in the mainstream consciousness. Moreover media constructed identities are made so prominent in media products that representations are taken to be the only reality. As Baudrillard argues of a theoretical state in his concept of hyperreality (Baudrillard) where simulations of reality replaces the real, similarly in case of regional violence as well media representations seem to look more real than the actual event. More so as media consumers who would otherwise never experience the violence are exposed to the incidents, repetitively in most explicit and shocking manner.

It is a concern today that if media disposes enough responsibility that comes with the immense power, to handle serious social issues, to take human emotion further to social development without hurting sentiments and not enraging people. Thus it becomes important to study the effectiveness and appropriateness in various mass scale productions of homogeneous media products. Time has come to rethink the role of media; to create hope to the local residents and creating positive image of the society over the boundary of the region to nation as well as beyond.

Representation of violence in media and its effect on individual as well as the whole society is a serious concern. All communicators, media content producers thus need to analyse and understand the consequences before putting forward any content to public. Means and methods are to be thoroughly studied in context specific environment. Role of media is not limited to act as a mirror to the society, and if at all it acts as a mirror media show also reflect the better side of the society rather than the gloomier one. Media also needs to be addressing the issue as to how to make representations inviting and participatory, so as to for those looking at the mirror (as media is popularly considered to be the mirror of the society) helps participate and reduce the unacceptable of the society through representations of violence in media from being a “prism” refracting its pluralism in terms of Stein and Friedrich that selectively focuses (1975: 241). If media acts as mirror only then direct representation

may impose stress and depression. So role should be of media judgemental information sharing so that a positive image towards life can be practiced.

Media possesses immense power to rein on public, create public opinions, perceptions, faiths and beliefs. But it is questionable if media disposes enough responsibility that comes with the immense power, to handle serious social issues, to take human emotion further to social development without hurting sentiments and not enraging people. Thus it becomes important to study the effectiveness and appropriateness in the representations in media so as to encourage positive image building as well as feel good factor which would lead to positive- not negative- effects on the media consumers. And for this common good there is a need for public health perspective, especially the considered weaker sections of the society the children and the elderly for whom the media serves as the only window for knowing and understanding the outside world in most cases. For this section the scopes for validating the facts or varied perspective using other media outlets are also very limited.

It may be apparently concluded that representation of violence in various forms of tragedy, conflicts, displacements etc. is expected to attract the media consumers. Media houses and practitioners often are seen profiting off of the fear and entertainment value that such stories of sensationalised reports of violence perpetuate. Certainly the impact of violence in any society in respect to profit, politics, power, expectations and civilisation may not be ruled out of preferred representation in media. But the broader issue of violence with reference to reporting of violence in Assam needs to be relooked into with defined role and scope of media for distinctive regional issues to be properly addressed and represented for the entire consumer world to benefit from. The objective of media ideally is to inform people, not create prejudices and stereotypes; neither to provide tainted views to its consumers' thought only partial projections; and also not to confirm and reconfirm notions. So if Northeast has been branded wrongly and has been brought to limelight, though in less than expected number of times, for all the inappropriate and negative reasons the status quo needs to be changed. Media practitioners and others (all who were surveyed) believe that media has the potential to do so, and they are also eager to see

their working context in this light. It may be serious area of concern and action for media houses and individual media practitioners, working in and for the region to deploy media representations to generate means and methods through the locals aspirations that can be used for a positive imaging of the place and community in media attempting overall benefit and development as well as wellbeing of the media practitioners working in the field and provide them with better work environment. There is a lot of scope in the region for media education, training, skills development, understanding media, responsible journalism, utility aspect of media and improving information availability in content and context, rather than preordained concentration on reporting of violence only.

It is implicative that media through selective reporting of violence and stereotypical projection of constructed identities in prolonged conflict situations like in the case of the Northeast, only acts as a propaganda tool. As a report of the South Asia Media Monitor states “political, ethnic and religious extremists continue to use the media to propagate divisions in South Asia-in a relationship that encompasses the ambivalence of the secular media, the impact of tele-evangelicalism, and the role of state owned media bodies in promoting biases- there is an urgent need to disperse the negative images of ‘the Other’” (Lal 9). Though the possibilities of resolution has been identified in various contexts, by various studies conducted in the academic field, the present study as well attempts the same, very little of the recommendations are apparently taken into consideration in practice in the media industry. Media practitioners in the media industry need to be sensitised to think beyond their narrow business interests and consider more their responsibility towards the society.

Before the situation further aggravates, the media especially in Northeast India, must take adequate steps to reduce violence in its content. The concern should not only be what is being projected but also on how it is being projected. Taking inputs from researches being carried on in the academic field, relevant recommendations and rectifications might be made to the representation content and context. Probably the quantity of violent content and the nature of representation both needs to be equally monitored. Perhaps a kind of violence rating system may be established by which media content can be monitored. Media needs to method ways of representation and

perhaps look for innovations not only in presentation styles like it has been in most experiments in media industry and news but also needs to work upon strategies that would improve the content and quality of media. Finally as Chomsky (2011) asserts “As long as the general population is passive, apathetic, diverted to consumerism or hatred of the vulnerable, then the powerful can do as they please, and those who survive will be left to contemplate the outcome”.

### **5.7 Further Scope of Research**

The present study concentrates on media practitioners’ views gathered through purposive sampling based on availability and convenience to interact with, in and around Guwahati city of Assam. Along with the regional media practitioners’ views the mainstream media interaction would have been scope for further study to enrich the finding presented herein.

The thesis primarily focuses on instances of collective violence. In order to get an insight of the complete violence representation scenario exclusive situations of individualistic violence like domestic violence, gender related violence, etc. may also be considered for further work.

The study is expected to yield more prominent results if media practitioners’ views from the mainstream media are also gathered as a counter view of the regional media practitioners’ and representation of violence and Northeast.

In concentrating on the consumerist aspect of media production what is often left out is the effect the media texts have on the consumers. Thus a varied users group requires being studied indepth to figure out the effect of representations of violence on them. It is expected to help interpret the impact (if negative at all) of crude representation of violence in media.

The findings were presented in academic conferences to get support and feedback on the issues. Similar discussions and consultations with working media practitioners of the region as well as the mainstream media houses are required to validate the findings.

In addition to the respondents' responses archival reports of various instances of violence situations and related media coverage in newspapers and by television channels of regional as well as mainstream media, may possibly work as a complementary study to reveal the quality of coverage with exact weightage of time and space allocations.

A study on likely to be affirmative representation of instances of violence and identification of other aspects to be ideally covered by media could have been attempted to be prototyped; and effectiveness and feasibility studied.

Observations of this present study suggest the need for further work in the areas of media representation and impact in reference to violence and Northeast in order to reduce the negative outcomes of media's conventional violence and selective reporting. Additionally, future research may wish to focus more attention on innovative attempts being made in the field of journalism evolving into better content and context of media reporting. Apart from identifying the rationale for selective reporting and comparatively fewer attempts being made at looking beyond the immediate incidents of violence by media makers, it may also be required to look into the process through which media consumers react to violence representation in reference to a particular place and context, in understanding and approving of the society depicted.

Similar studies may be carried on media representations of various other aspects specific to the region other than violence reporting in media to study media representations.

It draws attention to understand the residents of this region, of their aspirations and representation of their being in media, to appropriate positive identity, to motivate self and for others to express their being. Such media coverage needs to be examined in the current context of increasing market influence and commercialisation. An enquiry in this effect needs to be carried out on media experts and people beyond the regional boundaries.

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## Appendix A: Reference Images

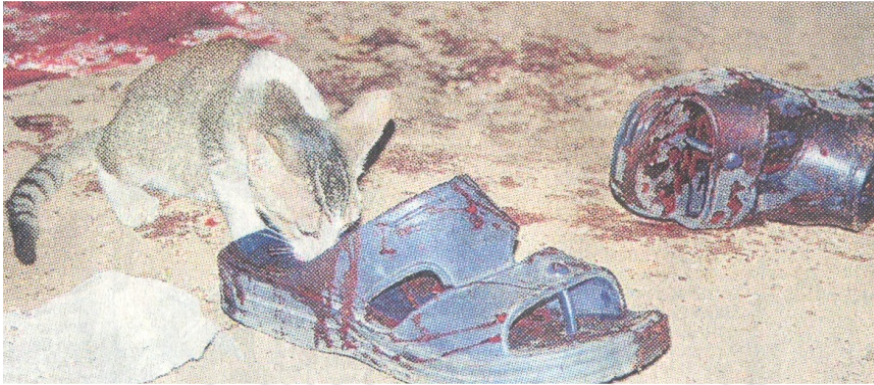


Image 1: Cut-out of *The Telegraph* cover photograph on 31 November 2008 (a day after serial blasts in Assam)



Image 2: Remains of a house burnt by rioters in Kokrajhar. Photograph released by *Press Trust of India*



Image 3: Direct depiction of violence on news portal- *Times of Assam*



Image 4: Television screenshot of Blast news in Jorhat that figures in Top20 news from the entire country at number 4



Image 5: Special Report of IBN Khabar- Field report on violence effect



Image 6: Hindustan Times' report on Assam violence



Image 7: Screenshot of Live footage from Blast site, 30 October 2008 on TimesNow



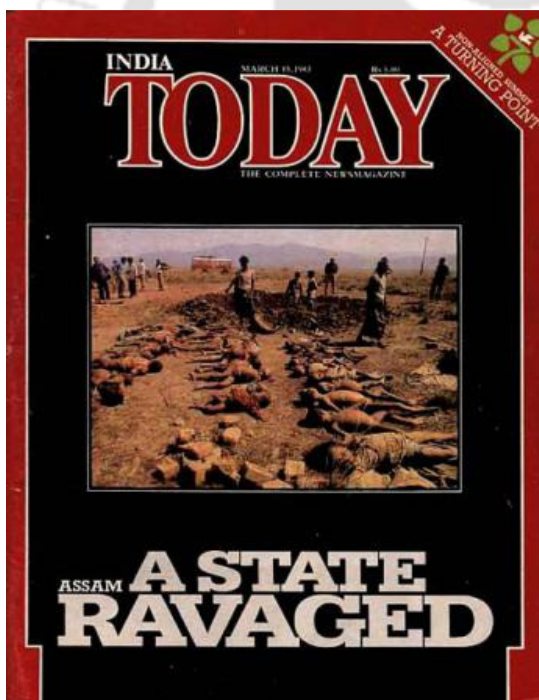
Image 8: Live Blast footage on national news channel, CNN IBN on 30 Oct. 2008



Image 9: Blast site footage, tagged as "UNEDITED FOOTAGE" and broadcasted on national television news channel



**Image 10:** The woman with the only living member of the family after Nellie Massacre, rest killed. Photograph extensively used throughout media



**Image 11:** *India Today's* cover on the Nellie massacre, 9 December 2011



Image 12: Children and women portrayed as victims of ethnic violence in Assam, on *India Today* cover of 13 August 2012



Image 13: *IBN Live* reports on Assam violence



Image 14: Picture story on *The Telegraph*, Calcutta edition, 5 January 2015



Image 15: Exclusive report by NewsX on Assam violence

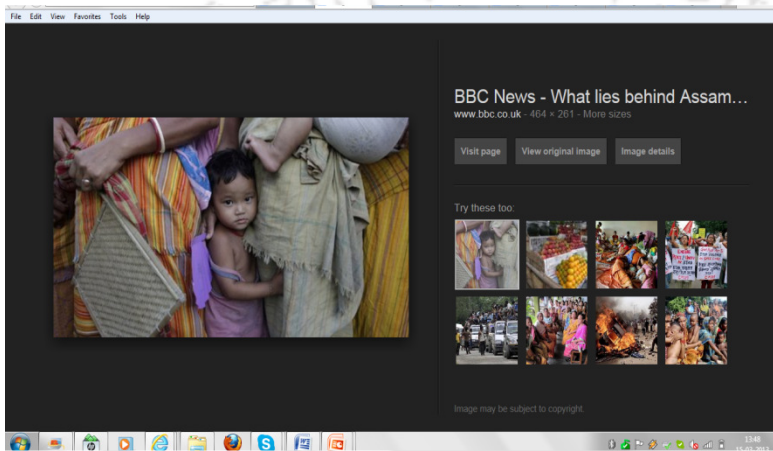


Image 16: BBC News web report on Assam Violence with direct violence images from field



Image 17: A still image from AAJ TAK News report broadcasted on 25 December 2014



Image 18: NewsX “Breaking News” reports on ethnic clashes in Assam. Live report with follow-up visuals



Image 19: Ethnic violence hit Assam-Meghalaya border on national television channel- NDTV 24X7



Image 20: Depiction of Kokrajhar violence on India Today website on 7 August 2012



Image 21: 'The Worst Victims Were Under Five Children' - a still from the NDTV 24x7 news story on 2012 ethnic clashes



Image 22: India TV newsdesk report on "Over 7000 people, including pregnant women, displaced by Assam violence"



Image 23: A still from a Times Now report on Victims of Assam violence



Image 24: The Indian Express story with heading "Assam: Violence displaces 7,000, among them a woman with newborn" 26 December 2014.



Image 25: Cut-out from the newspaper *Prabhat Khabar* on 25 November 2007, a day after the Beltola violence took place.



Image 26: *The Telegraph (Calcutta Edition)* front page cover story image "A young Adivasi woman ran down a Guwahati street naked, stripped by ethnic rioters."



Image 27: Still from a national television channel's coverage of "Adivasi women stripped, beaten up in Assam"



Image 28: Cut-out from the newspaper *PratiDin* depicting aftermath of violence



Image 29: Guwahati Molestation report on national television on 10 July 2012



Image 30: Still from the news on "National level athlete branded as Witch, brutally assaulted in Assam" on a television news channel on 17 October, 2014



Image 31: Live reporting on 17 July 2012 on Guwahati Molestation case which occurred on 9 July 2012



Image 32: Still from a news report of a television news channel on 4 September 2014



Image 33: “Assam: Floods leave over 1 lakh homeless, Kaziranga reels under water”, *IBN Live* report



Image 34: *BBC* report on Assam floods



Image 35: *News X* report on Assam Floods



Image 36: Aljazeera Report on Assam violence dates 24 December 2014

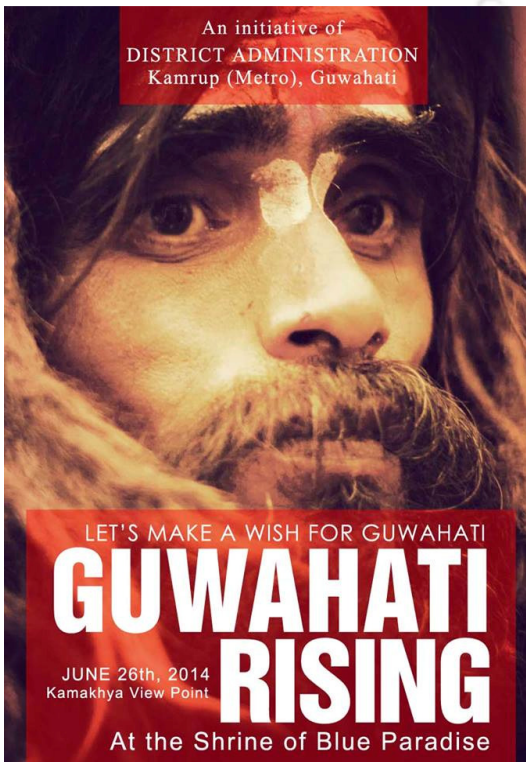


Image 37: Let's make a wish for Guwahati

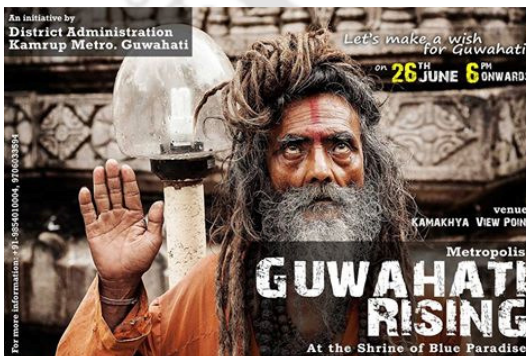


Image 38: Poaster of Ambubachi Mela issues by the District Administration





Image 39: Ambubachi Mela coverage by CNN IBN

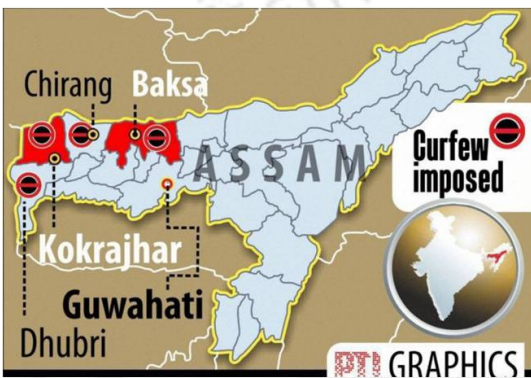


Image 40: Assam Violence graphics released by PTI after 2012 riots taken up by TOI and Economic Times on 20 August 2012 and by various other newspapers



Image 41: A still shot of the Incredible Northeast campaign as run on television



Figure 42: A News X report on Assam violence published on 9 August 2012

## Appendix B: Questionnaire used in the study

IIT Guwahati

Department of Humanities and Social Sciences

A Study of Media Representation with Reference to Reporting of Violence in Assam

Strict confidentiality will be maintained. The data will be used for research purpose only.

### Interview Schedule

1. Name (optional):
2. Sex:
3. Age:
4. Media organisation:
5. Designation:
6. Since how long have you been working in media?
7. What are the strategies to attract people to a particular programme?
8. Do you have a rule book for the media content? What are its chief features?
9. Are there any particular norms that you follow or your media house follows for representation of violent content?
10. What does “representation in media” imply to you?
11. What is your understanding of violence or representation of violence?
12. What do you understand by representation of violence in media?
13. How do media houses in general look at violence or deal with violence?
14. How is violence in Northeast being represented in media? What is your response to such representation?
15. How is violence representation of the Northeastern region any different from the way it is usually done in the mainstream?
16. Is there any priority given to violence content in news rather than other aspects of the region? Why is it so?
17. Is there a norm for the selection or omission of violence content in media?

18. Talking of various modes of media, mainly print, television and the web, are the strategies different regarding representation of violence?
19. If it can be considered that the representation of Northeast India is done in a particular manner in media, a certain pattern then can be said to be perceived. What are your views? Is there any emergence of trend?
20. What could be seen as the causes responsible for such responses/ patterns or variations?
21. Treating media texts that can be interpreted, how do you think that Northeast can be interpreted through those texts?
22. Can representation of violence in media be evaluated?
23. Regarding the negative aspect of representation of violence, please cite certain examples from Northeast/ Assam in recent times and in the past.
24. What is the most practical way of fighting the negative side of representation of violence according to you?
25. How can it be practised to serve the society better as the fourth pillar and fulfill social responsibilities without hampering sentiments of the people and the image of the region? How feasible is this in today's media context of Northeast and Assam?
26. What kind of perception do people usually have outside the region about the Northeastern region? How far is the media responsible? :
27. What are the cultural or ethical concerns you have before releasing a media product?
28. What are your ideas about sub-nationalism/ separatism in Northeast?
29. Of the media producers how much are they actually involved with the place and event. The media makers and the journalists working in the field?
30. Are women actually targeted as victims (in media representation of violence against women given priority)?
31. Are women associated with extremist groups represented in a particular way? Please give your views on this.
32. Is effect of violence on women given any priority over others?
33. What is the role of women journalists in representation of violence in media?

34. Regarding violence on Assamese in Assam and violence on other ethnic groups, is there any bias or particular stereotype in projection? Please elaborate.
35. How are peace makers projected in media (eg *Mamoni Raisom Goswami*)?
36. How much of the representation of violence is survival technique/tactics?
37. Regarding the scale of violence, what is exposed and what is not in your media house?
38. What level or category of violence is usually accepted by the mainstream media (national newspapers or television channels)?
39. What kind of violence gains more attention (TRPs)?
40. What, according to you, may be the possible solution to overcome the obstacles of the *politics of representation of violence* in the media? Please explain in details.
41. What are the mainstream collaborations of your media house if any?
42. Of the media producers how much are they actually involved with the place and event. The media makers and the journalists working in the field?

## Appendix C: Profile of 112 Respondents

List of 112 media experts from 22 media institutions (9 television channels and 13 newspaper houses) and 25 freelance media persons interviewed for the survey.

### Respondents from electronic media houses:

	DY 365	Newslive	Frontier TV	Prime News	News Time Assam	DD News	NETV	Aaj Tak	Asian News International (ANI)
Total no of respondents from each media house (59)	16	5	13	4	4	9	6	1	1
1.	Production Engineer	News Producer	Desk Editor	Senior Producer News/ Correspondent	Senior Producer/ Desk Editor	Producer News	Correspondent	Regional Correspondent	Bureau Chief
2.	Producer	News Coordinator	CEO & Content Editor	Anchor/ Programme Producer	Correspondent	News Editor	Correspondent/ Desk Editor		
3.	Producer/ Anchor	Anchor/ Reporter	Correspondent	Desk Editor/ Anchor	Video Editor	Additional Deputy Director News	Bureau Chief		
4.	Reporter	News Producer/ Anchor	Producer/ Programme Editor	Reporter	Reporter	Production Assistant	Reporter/ News-Reader		
5.	Senior Editor	News Anchor/ Reporter	Correspondent			Copy Editor	Offline Editor		
6.	Copy Editor		Assistant Editor			News Producer Delhi	Desk Editor		
7.	Editor-in-Chief		Assistant Editor			Camera-person			
8.	Managing Editor		Desk Editor			Reporter			
9.	Senior Reporter		Senior Editor			Reporter			
10.	Anchor/ Programme Producer		Reporter						
11.	Desk Editor/ Anchor		Crime Reporter						
12.	Anchor/ Producer		Sub-Editor						

13.	Managing Director		Correspondent						
14.	News Anchor								
15.	Senior Producer/Anchor								
16.	Chief Camera-person								

### Respondents from English language newspaper organisations:

	Seven Sisters Post	The Sentinel	Times Of India	Eastern Chronicle	Tehelka	The Telegraph	The Assam Tribune
Total no of respondents from each media house (21)	8	2	3	4	1	2	1
1.	Senior Copy Editor	Sub-Editor	Correspondent	Correspondent	Principal Correspondent	Senior Correspondent	Sub-Editor
2.	Desk Editor	Correspondent	Correspondent	Senior Correspondent		Resident Editor	
3.	Copy Editor		Senior Assistant Editor	Reporter			
4.	Copy Editor			Photo-Journalist/Reporter			
5.	Copy Editor						
6.	Senior Editor						
7.	Correspondent						
8.	Senior Features Writer						

### Respondents from Vernacular language press

	Dainik Assam (Assamese)	Pratidin (Assamese)	Ajir Dainik Batori (Assamese)	Dainik Jugasankha (Bengali)	Adinor Sambad (Assamese)	Gana Adhika (Assamese)
Total no of respondents from each media house (7)	1	2	1	1	1	1
1.	Copy Editor	Copy Editor	Staff Reporter	Sub-Editor	Editor	Reporter/ Copy Writer
2.		Staff Reporter				

**Respondents with no single organisational affiliation- Freelance media persons**

1.	Producer
2.	Stringer
3.	Content Expert
4.	Editor, Jeevan magazine
5.	The Asian Age Reporter
6.	Feature Writer
7.	Editor-In-Chief At Northeastnews.in
8.	Copy Writer
9.	Former BBC Correspondent
10.	Photojournalist/ Independent Film Maker
11.	Bureau Chief, At Pratah Khabar Media Pvt Ltd; North-East Correspondent At Rajasthan Patrika And Correspondent, Sub-Editor At The Sentinel Group
12.	Leading Columnist Associated with The Indian Express
13.	Journalist, Secretary of Guwahati Press Club
14.	Actor, Producer, Director and Writer
15.	News Anchor/ Media Expert
16.	Independent Film Maker, Photographer and Documentarian
17.	Photojournalist/ Chief Photographer at Little Hands Production
18.	Journalist and Transmission Executive at All India Radio
19.	Associate Editor at The Arunachal Pioneer
20.	Independent Content Developer/ Features Writer and Editor, former Times of India correspondent
21.	Senior Journalist at Press Trust of India
22.	Assistant Director/Anchor
23.	Northeast Correspondent for ETV News
24.	Senior Journalist and former Executive Editor of Seven Sisters Post
25.	Producer and Copy Writer and RJ at South Asia FM and Lecturer at St. Anthony's College

## **Appendix D: Publications and conference reporting**

### **List of Publications based on thesis material**

**Conferences and seminars attended, and papers published** from the present work out come.

1. Chakrabarti, Payel and Liza Das. “Effective media representation for positive image building reference Indianness, North-east context” proc. National Conference on Research Methodology in Journalism and Mass Communication: De-westernizing Media Studies. Tezpur University, 26-28 November 2010. ICSSR
2. Short Term Course on “Ergonomics and Technology Applications”, IIT Guwahati, 25-29 October 2010, AICTE
3. Chakrabarti, Payel and Liza Das. “Communication for Sustainable Perception Aiming at Children” proc. National Conference on Emerging Trends in Communication Corporate and Academic, University of Petroleum & Energy Studies; Dehradun, December 2010
4. Chakrabarti, Payel “Media and Health: Reference to Representations, Design and Content” abstract proc. 98<sup>th</sup> Indian Science Congress, Part II: Abstracts; Chennai, January 2011, ISCA
5. Chakrabarti, Payel and Liza Das. “A study of communication for positive imaging through media representation with an ergonomic perception” Proc. International Conference on Human Factors: Innovation and Usability in Product Development, 15-17 December 2011. IIT Madras. Chennai
6. Chakrabarti, Payel “Attaining inclusive innovation for masses and role of media” 5<sup>th</sup> Vigyan Sancharak Sammelan, Science Communicators’ Meet; 99<sup>th</sup> Indian Science Congress. 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> January 2012. KIIT & NISER Bhubaneswar, Odisha, ISCA.
7. Chakrabarti, Payel and Liza Das. “Negative imaging of the Northeast India with reference to media marketisation” Proc. National Seminar on Journalism in the Age of New Media, 10-11 January 2012. Surendranath College for Women. Kolkata, UGC

8. Northeast Young Social Scientists' Meet. January 20-21 2012. Omeo Kumar Das Institute of Social Change and Development, ICSSR NER
9. National Workshop on Use and Deployment Web and Video Courses for Enriching Engineering Education. 4-5 November 2011, IIT Guwahati, MHRD.
10. Short Term course on Research Methods and Computer Applications in the Humanities and Social Sciences. March 2012, IIT Guwahati, ICSSR.
11. Chakrabarti, Payel and Liza Das. "Negative representation of Northeast India sells news" Issues of Media Policy Regulations and Ethics, ed Ambarish Saxena. New Delhi: Kanishka Publishers. 2012 ISBN 978-81-8457-401-2
12. Chakrabarti, Payel and Liza Das. "Ethnic Identity: Aspiration and Media Representation of Northeast" Proc. Abstract Volume. International Seminar on Ethnicity, Identity and Literature, 11-14 October 2012. Assam: Sibsagar College. 2012 ISBN 81-924140-6-X
13. Chakrabarti, P. and L. Das. "Northeast in Media: Representation vs. Reality". *LLD Journal of Professional Studies*. 3:1, 127-131. 2013. Print.
14. Payel, Chakrabarti and Liza, Das. "Ergonomics Perspectives to Media Occupation: Reference Northeast." *Ergonomics for Rural Development*. Ed. Prakash C Dhara. Midnapore: Department of Human Physiology with Community Health Vidyasagar University, 2015. 311-319. Print. ISBN: 978-93-5174-905-9
15. Chakrabarti, Payel. "Need for Ergonomic Intervention on Reporting of Violence in Northeast India with Reference to Media Occupation and Stressful Effect on Users." *User Centered Design and Occupational Wellbeing*. Ed Debkumar Chakrabarti. New Delhi: McGraw Hill Education, 2014. 267-272. Print. ISBN-13: 978-93-392-1970-3 and ISBN-10: 93-392-1970-8.
16. Chakrabarti, Payel and Liza Das. "North-East in Media: Representation vs. Reality." *New Media and Development*. Ed Dharmendra Singh. Delhi: Neha Publishers & Distributers, 2015. 65-78. ISBN- 978-93-80318-56-1.