

MILITANCY AND COMBAT: THE AFSPA AND MEDIA COVERAGE

by

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the general apathy of the mainstream newspapers in covering issues of the Northeast, with particular reference to the alleged cases of violence and human rights violation where the person/s against whom the allegations are under the legal protection of Armed Forces Special Powers Act, 1958. Various Human Rights Groups have brought forth many cases of alleged Human Rights violation and alleged cases of violence where the alleged against persons are having the benefit of AFSPA to avoid any trial by court. This paper has used a comparative study of content analyses of news items on incidents related to AFSPA and reports of such unreported violence related to insurgency those which were unpublished in the media (here newspapers) and brought forth by Human Rights Groups. This paper uses a content analysis of a selected sample of such news which were published with that were not published and shows that there is an underlying gap that exists in giving rightful focus to the problems of the region, as well as the inner contradictions faced by the regional media human rights violations are related to AFSPA.

Keywords: AFSPA (Armed Forces' Special Power Act), peacekeeping, Human Rights Watch Reports, insurgency, militancy, content analysis, media apathy, regional newspapers.

“The direct use of force is such a poor solution to any problem; it is generally employed only by small children and large nations”

—David Friedman

INTRODUCTION

Violence in the Northeast India especially for the conflict of insurgency and counter-insurgency measures of the state raises serious questions over several successive Governments' policies of peacekeeping in the Northeastern states of India for last six decades. The present paper is an outcome of a reading of Human Rights related Reports of relatively recent period – after 1970, to understand the pattern of the 'alleged unreported human rights' violation in violence or conflicts related AFSPA', and the more recent pattern of reporting on North East related to AFSPA

(Armed Forces Special Power Act) news to see what is the pattern of incidents reported and assess the role and coverage given by mainstream media (print media) to the existing problems of insurgency, militarization and separatism dogging the states of Northeast India for over half a century.

In doing this, a comparison between a selected sample of cases chosen from different Human Rights Watch Reports and reports on AFSPA reported in different mass media outlets (print media) was undertaken. This study, therefore, deals with different aspects of media coverage on AFSPA and tries to focus on the much-needed discourse on how the mainstream media has been denying the critical discussion of reports on human rights violations caused in any form or practice related to the AFSPA. This paper is, thus, more of a critique of the patterns of the media discourse on reporting on incidents related to AFSPA.

THE ARMED FORCES SPECIAL POWERS ACT, 1958

The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Acts (AFSPA), are (different versions of) an Act of the Parliament of India that are applied to grant special powers to the Indian Armed Forces while they are handling operations in territories that the State chooses to term as ‘disturbed areas’ based on its interpretation of the law and order situation in the concerned areas.

The first Act under this category was passed on September 11, 1958 and was applied to the seven states of Northeast India. The second Act was passed in 1983 and applied to Punjab and Chandigarh; it was later withdrawn in 1997. One more of such Acts was passed in 1990 and was applied to Jammu and Kashmir. However, for the purpose of this paper, AFSPA means only the 1958 Act which is applied to North East India.

These laws give sweeping powers to soldiers, including the powers to shoot to kill in certain situations and to arrest people without warrants. They also provide virtual immunity to soldiers from any prosecution for any violent act while on duty in these areas.

The argument against the AFSPA is the argument against the validity of state terror to curb terror created by anti-state / non-state actors. Violence ultimately gives rise to more violence. Brutalization erodes ideologies of people. Any state sponsored terror as terror handling tactics have historically given birth to many other rebel outfits.

Importance of political dialogue, understanding the ethnic identities of the people of the region and putting right way of development is most important and it is only by regular and sustained coverage of all the issues relating to the region and typical problems related to laws imposed as part of the State's counter insurgency operations – here AFSPA, that the mass media can arguably act as a catalyst to bring forth a comprehensive discussion of all stakeholders involved in solving the crisis.

It should also be noted that at least one state, namely Tripura in North East has recently got rid of the allegedly draconian AFSPA as violence in the state and separatist movement almost disappeared through ensuring development and addressing grievances of people. However, details of that dynamics of the experience of Tripura are outside the ambit of this paper.

AFSPA was enacted to deal with armed militancy. However, numerous allegations are there where unarmed women and men have been tortured or killed and no case was registered as the alleged persons of those cases are protected by AFSPA. Even proper reporting of these cases is also avoided by media, the Human Rights Groups allege.

This paper is just a small attempt to understand if there are any patterns of reporting incidents related to application of the AFSPA in different states of Northeastern India, and to understand if there is any denial in reporting alleged violence under the protection of AFSPA. This study has also tried to set forth a commentary on why the observed patterns have come to exist.

OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

Objectives of this research paper are the following:

1. To find out if there were cases of alleged unreported incidents of violence by AFSPA from 1970 till 2015 from secondary sources (human rights groups' reports).
2. To cross check the findings of the first objective with recently published reports related to AFSPA in mainstream media, with special reference to Hindu, Times of India, Indian Express, Assam Times and the Assam Tribune and see if it is true that allegation of violence cases do get published.
3. To understand if there is any media apathy to cover AFSPA-related news of alleged violence.

Methodology

1. To identify and estimate a comprehensive assessment of allegedly unreported incidents of violence related to AFSPA from 1970 till 2015 from secondary sources of Human Rights Groups for summarizing the pattern of so called unreported violence related to Human Rights as well.
2. To scan for AFSPA related news and prepare a table of select sample of published reports of incidents of violence in mainstream media, with special reference to Hindu, Times of India, Indian Express, Assam Times and the Assam Tribune. (Internet versions of the newspapers have been used for the purpose of the research).The method to identify the reports from the National Newspapers' web versions are scanned and identified using Google search with the key search words- "Violence by army in the North east", "AFSPA atrocities", "Army killings in the Northeast".
3. Content analysis of media coverage in both reported news to see the pattern of coverage and non-coverage.

MEDIA COVERAGE OF NORTHEAST

A general review of literature and articles written on this revealed some stark realities, some very current and some etched in historical necessities. History and politics, no doubt, has played a major role in the alienation of the entire Northeast from the hub of professional news making, However, international relations, strategic understandings between the countries of Southeast Asia of late has played a significant role containing insurgencies in general.

Our colonial masters in a provision to uproot the Santhal rebellion in India's struggle for freedom had initially settled a large population of the tribal people from Jharkhand in Assam, as it was remote terrain and the rebellion in any form would not materialize. There were Adivasis, Santhals, Mundas Oraons and various other subcultures who were settled forcefully at the periphery of the state. Whereas people were also living in this region from time immemorial, more Bengalis have gone there to live from East Pakistan and also allegedly from Bangladesh just before, during and after the partition and Liberation of Bangladesh respectively. The ethnic community of Assam felt that they would be sidelined. The noted historian Rahman quotes mass genocides during this phase, between the ethnic Assamese community and the migrants, the former trying to establish their identities and hold over the region.

The years between 1987 and 2003 saw a number of mass killings(Hussain, 2001), the movement for Bodoland, most of which went unreported in details (apart from news on casualties and violence). Media grossly undermined the burning problems of insurgency, branding the people as militants who wanted to disrupt day to day governance. Little did they fathom that the root cause of insurgent movements during the initial phase was the result of economic depression, migration induced poverty, refugee settlement and rehabilitation issues, food safety provisions that compelled the inhabitants to take up aggressive stands against the state. Added to this was historically embedded alienation, which had completely turned the Northeast as “alien space” both for the administration and the media.—“they (are) like objective enemies whose definition is created by virtue of their existence in a particular position at a historical moment in time, and that they do not fall within the self-definition of the state”(Oinam and Thangjam 2005).

In this context, how far the media acting as a catalyst in the democratization process of the state itself becomes questionable. There are several angles to this—have the mainstream media reports/coverage in any way been able to create a right perceptions among the people about the conflict situation in the Northeast?

We search the answer in this paper, though in a limited frame of Human Rights related issues. Here the singularly important question is if the elements of proximity became the sole criteria of news making an impact in the agenda of the press? If yes, then how do electronic media cover other incidents in remote areas? The underlying contradictions seem to be present in the media itself, and this in its turn is strongly guided by market principles of newspaper ownership and free market capitalism. Big industrial houses have mostly diversified into newspaper business in what is called both horizontal and vertical ownership. Hence, ‘what’ constitutes news has undergone a metamorphosis in the context of reporting Northeast India and its conflicts. The crises centering different states of the Northeastern India and its people haven’t fared well in the commercial ventures of modern mainstream newspaper industry.

According to many social scientists, there may be a binary existing between the core and the periphery, and this binary is sometimes kept alive, by the state system as well as the global political praxis. This tension is kept alive at times, and is reflected in their representation at the center, whether in political, social or human affairs. This practice, though in other contexts, has

been seen as the State's attempt at forming symbiotic relationships with its public and private media for exercising mass control over public thought in the Western democracies.

In our tabulation of 'alleged unreported incidents of violence and human rights violation by various cases under the protection of AFSPA' as presented by various human rights groups' reports, we get more than 25 cases with more than 100 victims.

Even if we leave the cases with reportedly 'molested' apart, we get more than 30 rape cases out of only 10 cases. One of these cases is the case of Thangjam Manorama, who was taken away on July 10, 2004 by 17 Assam Rifles, accusing her militant links with PLA. Later her body was found, autopsy revealed semen on her dress and murder along with 6 bullet wounds.

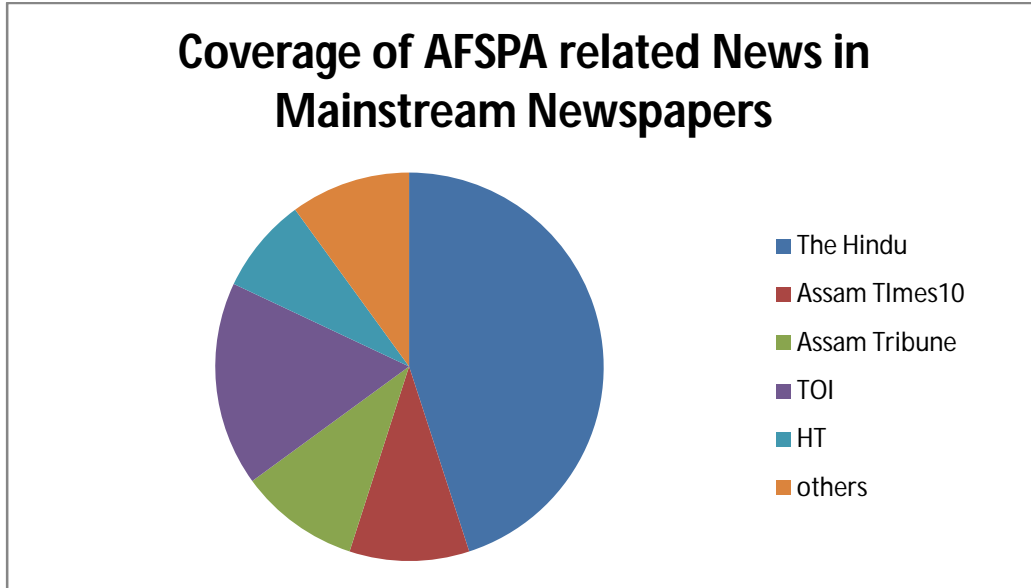
Despite the initial denial of the national press to carry the news, and the army saying about insurgency-link of Manorama and she was killed while 'escaping', anger spread throughout the state like a wild fire. Mothers of Manipur staged a naked protest in front of Fort Kangla – the army headquarters with a banner 'Indian Army! Rape US!'. The protest seriously hurt India's image in front of the international community and the then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh announced a series of measures for de-escalation of tension between the army and the people.

The above data pertaining to the period 1970 to 2015, may now be compared with our content search and analysis of mainstream media results. Only 14 per cent stories are related to violence. Remaining stories are versions of the government (state) or the insurgents (non-state actors). It is really a shocking revelation that Media attaches more importance to the point of view of the insurgents than they attach to the issues related to human rights of common people.

EVALUATING AFSPA-RELATED NEWS IN THE NORTHEAST--A STORY OF LOPSIDED AND SKEWED COVERAGE

A comparison of these data sets provides us with a great deal of interesting dichotomy in the sample of coverage of online print-media on incidents related to AFSPA. These incidents range across administrative and policy talks supporting and opposing AFSPA and some of its much debated sections allowing free-hand to security forces in handling operations in 'disturbed areas', bringing forth allegations of acts of severe human rights violations including killings, torture, rapes and so on.

Figure 1:PERCENTAGE-WISE DISTRIBUTION OF NEWSPAPER COVERAGE GIVEN TO THE AFSPA RELATED NEWS OF NORTHEAST INDIA IN THE SELECTED NEWS SCANNED USING SELECT KEYWORDS



The dichotomy in reporting AFSPA as seen from these two tables is that all reported incidents talked of policy dialogues, political arguments for or against imposing AFSPA, administrative decisions of extending AFSPA in certain areas of the states of the Northeast India or what can be said as moral or ethical questions on how AFSPA should be implemented. The allegedly unreported incidents, on the other hand, offer us all the sever incidents of human rights violations that should have been otherwise handled in the ambit of criminal acts instead of been seen as a collateral damage while upholding the Ideal State Apparatus and its military ingenuity.

The headlines given in newspaper reports covering the Northeast are mostly about insurgency, insecurity or peace talks. There has been stark hypocrisy by media as far as reporting critical human rights issues are concerned. The rape and murder of Thangjam Manorama was finally covered under duress by the mainstream media, only after some time when it understood that the news had already spread across regional media. But when 12 women sat on a *dharna* in New Delhi demanding punishment for the Manorama rapists, the media did not even bother to report the incident.

As evident from the analysis of media coverage that could be conducted considering the time and other limitations while conducting this study, it has been found that almost 47% of the issues covered in the mainstream Newspapers goes to *The Hindu* alone. This newspaper, along with the others in the selected sample has shown consideration for covering incidents of violence including human rights violation in the Northeastern states, especially those related to the AFSPA.

The Hindu's position is somewhat revealed through the headlines—'*Choosing Satyagraha over Spectacle*', '*An Abomination called AFSPA*', '*Judges reports reveals Manipur's AFSPA scars*' etc.

Regional Newspapers such as *Assam Times* and *Assam Tribune* have provided 20% of newspaper coverage in this sample. The problems of media finance as well as the inability to bridge the gap with the mainstream newspapers can be argued as few of the main reasons due to which the regional and even local papers weren't able to handle the sensitivity of the AFSPA atrocities with tact. Apart from this, most of the regional newspapers, like the *Assam Times* seem to have purposefully shifted focus from projecting the Northeast as a haven for militancy, and to general more market segmentation, have now focused more on city or urban centric issues of Assam and the other states.

Interestingly, *The Times of India*, known to be a Newspaper with a highly cosmopolitan outlook, has contributed only 17% as far as covering the Northeast problem is concerned, for *Hindustan Times*, it was 8% and other newspapers in total have contributed 10% of the total news coverage for covering Northeast India in the sample.

The remoteness of the area, flanked off by a mere 24 km link pass called the chicken-neck corridor in Shiliguri, has somewhat cut off the entire Northeast from the mainland. As a result of this, reporters have often been reluctant to cover the issues prevailing in the Northeast, however serious they might be. Apart from this, there has also been a marked indifference by mainstream newspapers to report on the Northeast.

“With its conflicts, its tribes and their under development, this is India's area of darkness, an area of little interest to the media and to those responsible for governance and more generally in the greater cultural space of the country. In metropolitan India, the dominant image of the Northeast

still remains that of a wild frontier.”(The Economist, Notes of the Week, Delhi Surrenders. August 6, 1960). Historical alienation notwithstanding, the entire Northeast has been clubbed into the same cultural and social stereotypes, something which not even the most polished of journalists have dared to venture. Or to conduct time to time research on the sheer variety of the life processes present in the people of the Northeast, who are remarkably distinct from each other by way of rituals, food, living conditions, gender equality, occupation and economic needs.

In fact, this binary attitude in the coverage of issues in the mainland versus that in the Northeast can be seen from the extensive coverage given to Anna Hazare on his anti-corruption drive and that of IromSharmila to repeal the draconian AFSPA and the atrocities of the militants in the name of purging insurgency movement s in the Northeast. when Anna Hazare went on a hunger strike for 13 days in New Delhi in August 2011, the entire Indian print and electronic media went berserk, covering each incident 24x7, where every move of Anna was recorded, analyses, every sound bite he gave, every move that his associated made created headlines. Media was quick to hype Brand Anna as another Mahatma in the making, attributing godlike qualities to him, and publishing pictures of noted politicians touching Anna’s feet to get his blessings. International media focused on the saintly halo of this frail man, carrying headlines of the hunger strike. Far removed from the limelight in Delhi, however, fasting for the last 11 years was IromSharmila, whose protest against the AFSPA never paid heed by the Indian government, who was force feeding her with a nose tube for the last 11 years! This story never got even remotely near to comparable coverage in any of the mainstream newspaper, except CNN-IBN carrying an interview that was telecast at the same time of Anna’s hunger strike. This often shows the double standards of the mainstream media.

The level of democratization of public opinion concerned regarding coverage in national dailies, barring a few has been abysmal.

When democracy fails to change public opinion, the deprived have no other alternative but to resort to undemocratic means of getting their voice heard (PradipPhanjoubam, editor of Imphal Free Press,in The Times of India, Editorial Page, November14, 2001). In his words, the amount of coverage that the media gives to incidents in the Kashmir region is far more than what it reports about the insurgency problem in the Northeast. A close analysis of the number of casualties in Manipur as compared to Kashmir from the period of 2005-2011 shows that Manipur

media alone reported 102 civilian casualties, 72 deaths of militants that included 37 encounters. The number of families affected in the Northeast was 1772 compared to Kashmir within the same time frame was 1139 (The Hindu, “Media Matters: Skewed Coverage” by SevantiNinan, Aug.31, 2009).

This alienation syndrome can also be traced to the apathy shown by print and electronic media alike when they simply refused to publish the 68 day economic blockade put up by the Naga student groups in 2010, cutting off Manipur from the rest of India and the Northeast, and the preceding death of student leader in the internal squabble. It was only after regional media started reporting this incident in the light of gross Human Rights violations that the national media woke up to the necessity of reporting the incident. It is unfortunate that news media have different connotations of what constitutes, and there is a prevalent double standard when it comes to the Northeast (South Asia Terrorism Portal: Civilians killed (2005-Jan 2011) Northeast 1772, Kashmir 1139).

This cultural and racial stereotyping has arguably struck the reporting patterns of news as well. Hence, most people have a sense of distrust when some media personnel happen to go to cover incidents. There is a noted suspicion among most of the people of the Northeast as they have been subjected to alienation both from the mainland as well as the media, who only report issues based on sensationalism and militancy. The story of the common people, their problems, the double exploitations at the hands of the militants as well as the patriarchy of the ethnic groups seldom gets covered. For them, media persons are like “*bahirotmanu*”, “*mayang*”, “*vai*”, “*baharmanu*”(terms used to denote Indians as outsiders in Assam (*bahirotmanu*), Manipur (*mayang*), Mizoram (*vai*), Nagaland (*bahar Manu*)). This margin versus mainstream representation perspective drives the entire media industry today.

As mentioned earlier, on July 15, 2004, 12 women disrobed themselves and stood naked in front of the fort Kanglprotesting against the rape and murder of Manorama -a 32 year old woman. Together they held one single white cloth that had “INDIAN ARMY RAPE US” written on it in red. India had never witnessed such a protest ever before. Even it was not initially reported in the media and the incident was covered later when otherwise it was picked up by international media from the local media.

Sometime later this very group of 12 women went and sat in protest in New Delhi, but the second protest was never covered. It seems oddity of news was more important to the media organizations than the content and urgency of the news.

One reason for this media apathy could be guided by media economics and the role of commercialization of print and television channels. The budgetary limitation is mostly faced by the regional print media in the Northeast like Assam Times or the Assam Tribune, and even if the constraints are not considered, the priorities for news are different. However, in the privately owned TV stations in Assam, the agenda setting is done purely on media economics, where focus is mainly on city-centric news. According to KishalayBhattacharjee: “Media as a business, as a reverse force multiplier or an instrument to propagate agenda has become more potent since the days of the Assam agitation only because there is so much media and there is no quality (or ethical) control over them (KishalayBhattacharjee, interview, published in The Hoot “Choosing Pen over the Gun” on September 27, 2011).

Also, there is a section of the local media which have strong empathy to the causes of the insurgents—called the “our boys syndrome”. This affects the objectivity and neutrality of the media to a large extent. According to ChitraAhanthem, a freelance journalist from Manipur, the deep fragmentation of the political and ethnic identity issues play out in the regional media in very subtle tones. News reporters from regional media have often been denied entry for news verification, example of which is the mass rape of the Hmar community in January 2006 by militants”. Most reporters from civil society in Manipur agree that the National print and electronic media have the resources to cover such stories. An addition is they do not carry any ethnic or political identity. However, for them the Kashmir issue is of prime importance followed by the Maoist conflicts (in a report by KhelenThockchom in March, 2006 in The Telegraph: Manipur Rape victims recount day of Horror).

Teresa Rehman, a senior journalist from Assam thinks that the regional media is still a fledgling. In her words, “these media houses play on parochial sentiments which could also be detrimental at times. Also, narrow political interests adversely affect the larger interests of the community” (Teresa Rehman in an interview on regional media).

However, from the concerned data that has been taken up for study in this paper, it has been found that there is a decisive role in the mainstream print media for rejecting and accepting reports related to AFSPA for publication.

This salient gatekeeping is something that needs to be understood in the context of the State-media collusion. This study has successfully found that there are biased discrepancies in choosing reports for publication on issues related to AFSPA.

While the mass media have often questioned decisions and actions of the State in several occasions, its agreement in this context is something that can be seen as the prime heuristic provocation of this study.

CONCLUSION

Thus, we may say that there is the intermingling of historic denial as well as diplomatic overtures in handling media operations that has made many of the real concerns of AFSPA in the states of Northeast India an almost alienated kingdom to the mainstay of Indian population. This study has also found that the choice in reporting incidents related to AFSPA for a period of over four decades had followed a singular pattern which can be no co-incidence. However, the reason for such denial would be the domain of a cross-disciplinary study that may be undertaken in future to fully understand the political and commercial implications of such a practice. Rajeev Bhattacharyya, a journalist who is from North East (Assam) and has been reporting North East for nearly two decades while accepting that some militants groups had even hurled grenades in media offices, has been unequivocally clear in asking repeal of AFSPA. (His interview transcript taken for this study is appended in the appendix, and it reflects adequately on some of the critical aspects of these issues.) Indian Army being the second largest army, he said, it “should not be armed with special draconian laws to tackle a few thousand militants in Northeast”, particularly because according to his estimate is on the opposite side, there is only 8000 - 9000 separatist militants in the Northeast (most of whom are in various camps located at Myanmar now: we get a vivid picture of that in his book *Rendezvous with the Rebels*, which is a description of his three month trek in the hilly terrains of Eastern Nagaland – Myanmar).

For many decades, the Northeast is known to be a haven of militants where engineers and officers are abducted for extortion of money. The Government of India’s lack of insight to deal

this situation both politically apart from militarily, and empathy along with an arguable lack of regards to basic human rights were the reasons of such anomaly. Why? Bertil Lintner, an ace conflict reporter and a former correspondent with the Far Eastern Economic Review has a simple answer—“Because it’s an important part of India and the region, the crossroads between India, Southeast Asia and China”. (‘Tyranny of Access’ which came up at the OxPeace Conference at St. John’s Collegiate Oxford after his talk on Reporting Northeast).

APPENDIX

INTERVIEW OF RAJEEV BHATTACHARYYA, AUTHOR OF 'RENDEZVOUS WITH REBELS'

1. Do you think mainstream media has apathy in reporting insurgency problems and the presence of AFSPA in the Northeast? Why?

There are two reasons for that. First, this is part of the general apathy to cover issues on the Northeast. There is an impression that news stories on Northeast would not be preferred by readers. Secondly, there is lack of understanding on the Northeast and its myriad insurgent movements. The general idea is that the insurgents are trying to break the country which is bad and which is why all initiatives by the army, security forces against the insurgents must be supported. That nobody becomes an insurgent by choice is not appreciated.

2. What is your take on the inner line permit?

It should be in vogue in the entire Northeast. Northeast is hyper sensitive and its not only a frontier zone but the most strategic zone in the country. Already, immigration has fuelled severe conflicts especially in Assam. If the situation is not brought under control, Assam might soon be heading for a civil war. It will be a conflict between the indigenous communities versus the Bangladeshi immigrants.

3. Why do you think the Northeast suffers from a cultural stereotype? -Because of the remoteness of the region. Interaction with the region is limited. Secondly, because of the media, the Northeast doesn't matter too much. In fact it is not widely known that no states are similar in the Northeast.

4. Is there any bias in reporting only specific incidents about the Northeast in mainstream newspapers? If yes, what are the determinants of that news?

Yes there seems to be a bias and this is more pronounced in TV. TV it seems prefers sensationalism which is true mostly of Times Now, the leading news channel in the country and where i worked for three years as the Northeast correspondent. Incidents related to violence, killings and militancy are given more prominence. The print media is a shade different in that it bothers to cover other aspects as well which is mainly because there is space in print media to carry a variety of stories.

5. *What is your take on AFSPA?*

It should be repealed immediately. The Indian army is the second largest army in the world. And the second largest army should not be armed with special draconian laws to tackle a few thousand militants in Northeast. My estimate is that there are 8000 - 9000 separatist militants in Northeast. There are others as well, but they are not demanding independence. In fact the majority are not demanding independence.

6. *How much do local/ regional Newspapers cover critical issues of Northeast? Is there any way of bridging the gap with mainstream media?*

Local newspapers are found to cover critical issues but follow up is sadly missing. Local newspapers also thrive on sensationalism...this would include TV as well. The gap with the mainstream media can be bridged only if the media houses/ editors realize that they have a responsibility towards all regions and social classes in the country and only if they realize that their objective shouldn't be only to garner revenue and raise the TRP.

7. *As a reporter were you ever under pressure from militant groups to feature their side of the problem?*-Yes sometimes. Rather than being under pressure, militant groups have always been keen to prove their version right in every episode.

8. *What is your take on ethnic cleansing?*

It is one of the outcomes of the malaise afflicting the region. When year after year the indigenous communities have found their lands being grabbed by immigrants with the government not doing anything, they have at times decided to settle the problem themselves. Ethnic cleansing is deemed as the solution and targeted against specific communities.

9. *Why are major incidents off the radar of mainstream media?*

Environmental fragility of the region and the government's suicidal policies like mega hydel projects. Other issues that have remained off the radar are flood, erosion, corruption and faulty development planning.

10. *Did regional newspapers feel closeness to the demand of the militants? Was there objectivity in reporting?*

A different picture would emerge if the scenario in the respective states is taken into consideration. The media in Manipur has been the most objective and they have never given in to the demands by militants. Many a time, grenades have been hurled in media houses, editors

and journalists threatened in Imphal. At the same time, the possibility of some journalists being close to militant outfits cannot be ruled out. In Assam likewise, it is difficult to give the answer in either "yes" or "no". Some no doubt are very close and sympathize with the militants; some are close to gather information only and they have always maintained objectivity.

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