



Print Media and Secularism: A Case Study from South Assam, India

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Abstract: *The word Secularism is understood in many different ways since it became a much used word at different points of time in history and place. In India, usually, Secularism is understood as neither connected to any religious community, nor hostile to any religion. It is basically impartiality with respect to different communities and their life practices. It is expected that the State as well as the Fourth Estate, i.e. the Media will remain neutral with respect to such different communities and their life practices. However, one may always argue that depending on the background of the target readers and the media owners there can be exceptions to such neutrality and the policy of gate-keeping may be affected by a bias. In this small study, it is explored how far this possibility could be true through a case study of testing gate-keeping policies through a study of reader's perception and ownership of the Newspapers. The results are surprising!*

Keywords: Secularism, Press, South Assam, Media bias, Content analysis

Introduction

Secularism is understood as not connected to any religious community, nor hostile to any religion. "Secularism in the broadest sense means that people do not resort to religion to make decisions, to adopt policies, to administrate their lives, to organize their relationships, or to compel their acts," writes prominent humanist and author Jim Herrick.

Keeping religious doctrine, superstition, and ideas based on religion out of politics is what we mean when we talk about the secularism movement, though. That doesn't necessarily imply advocating atheism, but it does entail a principle that society is most just and people's rights are most protected when religion is kept out of public policy and practices.

Secularists support the creation of public policy that is based on facts, logic, and science. One can be religious and still think that secularism is the most equitable and equal form of government because it guarantees religious freedom for everyone, favouring no one religion over another or even atheism.

Under secularism, every religion is accorded equal respect. No religion should receive preferential treatment, according to Dr. Radhakrishnan, Educationist and former statesman of India, since it would be against democracy's fundamental principles to give anyone special privileges, nobody should receive them. Based on someone's religion, there shouldn't be any discrimination or limitations. In daily life, everyone ought to have unequalled freedom.

The Concept of Secularism from existing literature

A secular society means that no particular religious community is particularly protected by the state. Accepting one's unique situation and enabling oneself to act as one pleases are both aspects of religion. In the British Encyclopedia, secularism is described as being non-spiritual. Secularism is not atheism; rather, it accepts the fundamental principles of all major world religions while rejecting the notion of a state-sponsored religion.

British author George Jacob Holyoake adopted the term "secularism" to convey his thoughts



about creating a social order independent of religion without explicitly rejecting or denouncing religious belief. According to Holyoake, "secularism is not an argument against Christianity; it is one independent of it." Instead of undermining Christianity's lofty ideals, it helps others. Secularism affirms the existence of both in secular reality rather than making the claim that there is no light or guidance elsewhere. Knowledge with roots in this world is unmistakably referred to as secular knowledge.

Dr. V.P. Luthera argued that what has been referred to as Indian secularism is actually not secularism at all in his book *The Secular State and Indian*. He asserts that there are three basic approaches employed in western countries.

The first is a secular society, in which the state's engagement in religion is completely absent and it is seen as a private concern. This strategy is popular in the US.

The second situation is when a church has been around for a time. The established church is subject to the authority of the state in a number of important respects. In such a society, other religions are accepted, and they are free to practise their faith without interference from the government. This is the British system.

The system of jurisdiction, as outlined by Luthera, comes in third. The state still has complete control over all religious matters, but all religions are supposed to have equal access to freedom under this system. In Indonesia, religions are given a similar standing as in Holland, which has a jurisdictional structure in existence.

However, the relationship between the state and religion in Japan seems to more closely resemble the western idea of secularism. The state and its agencies are not permitted to provide religious instruction or engage in any religious activity.

The most well-known example of secularism is possibly found in the United States constitution. The first sentence of the United States Constitution states that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." According to a letter he sent to the committee of the Danbury Baptist Chapel on January 1, 1802, this suggested to Thomas Jefferson that there existed a "well of separation between church and state." (1. *The Constitution of the United States: A Transcription*, 2015)

According to this First Amendment clause, there should be both a separation of church and state and freedom of religion, it is generally agreed. Actually, this has meant that in public schools and other places under government control, the US Supreme Court has made it illegal for any behaviour that may be interpreted as a government endorsement of religion. The government is not permitted, with some exceptions, to exhibit religious symbols in courts, public schools, or other government structures. The official religion in Mexico is agnostic. In order to amend the constitution and formally identify the Mexican government as "secular," the lower house of the Mexican Congress introduced legislation in March 2010.

Indian Secularism

To describe secularism in the Indian tradition, consider the three ideas listed below.

One is the liberal philosophical tradition's support for the secularism that is a hallmark of western culture. There should be no overlap between politics and religion. Both politics and religion should not be influenced by one another. Various agreements apply to the two goods. Second, the worldview of the transformationalists strongly emphasises the advancement of politics, society, and the economy. According to this philosophy, people should try to promote a scientific outlook. They also acknowledge that religion should be kept in one's personal sphere. Third, Gandhian ideology has had a distinct impact than transformational and liberal ideology. Gandhians strongly advocate against prejudice and religious intolerance. The two cannot be separated since politics and religion are intertwined. Indian secularism, which is fundamentally different from western secularism, is influenced by the three prominent concepts.



According to the Indian constitution, India is stated to be a sovereign, socialist, secular, and democratic republic. The dominant view of secularism in India generally adheres to the values of religious tolerance and official proclamation of a division of religion and state. However, unlike the western model, where no law would preferably be linked to any particular community, In India traditional laws of few major communities have been endorsed or partially endorsed and codified by the state, particularly on such matters as marriages and inheritance, defining the rights of the respective community institutions clearly in such matters. This is not exactly in tune with the western model, where the law would be one. But in India, diversity in the beliefs and practices have been attempted to be accommodated in the process of law and judiciary through endorsement or partial endorsement of such practices of different communities through providing community specific marriage acts for numerically significant groups, and keeping another “secular” process for others separately.

The Indian Constitution was based on a secular worldview, in the limited sense that indicates that no specific religion is regarded as the state religion in India. All religions shall be equal in the eyes of the state. The secularism outlined in the Indian constitution is based on religious tolerance and policy of non-discrimination. A secular society is conceived within a paradigm where religion is also acknowledged to exist. The Indian Constitution has a number of clauses in addressing this.

According to the preamble of the Indian constitution, "We the people of India" The essence of secularism is captured in this assertion. This sentence should not mention any particular faith. But in 1974, the word "secular" was inserted into the constitution. India was a secular state before 1974, notwithstanding this. Even though the term "secularism" is not explicitly declared, India was a secular state under the constitution. The various constitutional clauses and judicial decisions make this very evident.

The secularism principle is incorporated into the development of democracy through protecting national integrity and unity. The constitution includes further guidelines for the growth of a secular society. Due to their religion, race, caste, gender, or place of birth, no citizen shall be subject to discrimination under Section 15 of the Constitution. Article 25 guarantees the right to freedom of religion. The practice, propagation, and promotion of one's religion are completely free for any Indian person. However, it is against the law to discriminate against citizens due to their faith in public. Section 28 prohibits the teaching of religion in educational institutions that receive financial support from the state. Article 30 states that all minorities have the right to establish educational institutions that reflect their preferred religion and tongue.

Nehru's Secularism

The first Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru favoured secularism to safeguard religious neutrality, ensuring religious equality for all minorities living in India. The freedom of religion accorded to all religions in India is conditioned by the fact that it is subject to all considerations of public order, morality, and the general welfare of the community. This shows that Indian secularism is not necessarily absolute. Any freedom or right protected by article 25 of the Indian constitution may also be subject to restrictions imposed by the state. Any such restriction shall be judged by the judiciary as to whether or not it adheres to the spirit of the constitution.

Nehru allowed religion to contribute to societal welfare. Nehru invoked the legacy of Ashoka who was known for his assertion of peace and tolerance in later life, as well as Akbar who were indifferent in his dealings with members of all faiths. Nehru believed that a secular nation was one in which the state upheld religious neutrality.

In Nehru's opinion, the only way to improve humanity or a country was to accept scientific practices, tools, and methods. He acknowledged that religion, in some form, is necessary for the majority of people because it has provided human life with a set of moral principles and because



science completely disregards the values and purposes of life, whereas religion hampers the advancement of science in society. He was impressed by Buddhism since, like Lord Buddha, its principles were based on science. Nehru said, "It is science alone that can alleviate the problems of sickness, malnutrition, poverty, and illiteracy of huge wealth running to waste of prosperous countries inhabited by starving people," at this point. In today's society, the relationship between the state and religion that exists and should exist is referred to as a "secular state." All of the countries with liberal democratic traditions reflect our idea of the secular state in many ways.

A state is referred to as a "secular state" if it protects both individual and corporate freedom of religion, treats all citizens equally regardless of their religious beliefs, is not constitutionally required to support any particular religion, and neither strives to promote nor oppose it. Therefore, a secular state is one in which its citizens are not subjected to any form of religious prejudice. You might think of secularism as a philosophy or as a way of life. However, it must be viewed in the context of nation-building in practice.

First of all, Nehru consistently believed that India should be a multi-religious nation where everyone, irrespective of faith, had equal rights and obligations. One of the central principles of secularism in India was to accord all religions an equal status. He believed that every society ought to be able to hold religious rituals. He believed that no religion should be deprived of its legal privileges or forced to rely on the acceptance of another faith in a given community. It fully understands the idea of religious freedom; to him, it means treating all religions equally and giving people of all faiths the opportunity.

The second definition of secularism offered by Nehru is the notion that the government ought to be impartial when it comes to religious matters. Nehru insisted vehemently that the government of an independent India must be secular, meaning it cannot be connected to any specific religion. Any mention of a Hindu or Muslim ruler was vehemently condemned by Nehru on a regular basis.

Thirdly, the secular state or ideology of Nehru also related to a particular mindset on the part of various communities. The need for people to embrace a mindset that may foster harmony and a sense of fraternity among various religious groups, particularly in India, cannot be overstated. He believed that from a theological standpoint, it was the dominant community's responsibility to refrain from utilizing its influence in any way that may jeopardise our secular objective. He emphasized how the minority community experiences dread anytime the majority develops a constrictive and antagonistic mentality. Given Nehru's fervent devotion to secularism, it was better to upset a few people and lose an election than to fall short of his objectives.

The fourth point is that Nehru supported secularism in all aspects of public life. Nehru recognized how much religions had influenced marriage, inheritance, civil and criminal law, as well as other facets of society. By creating religious sway and power, he said they create a whole social order and work to maintain it.

India is a unique state that upholds secularism while simultaneously preserving its spirituality. Maintaining a reasonable balance between secularism and religiosity, taking reasonable steps to accommodate religious sensitivities of the populace, avoiding discrimination against citizens based on their religion to the greatest extent possible, and making an effort to treat all citizens equally regardless of their religious affiliation are among the fundamental characteristics of religion-state relations in India. The legal and political framework of the nation recognises both God and Caesar, although India's notion of "what belongs to god" is larger than that of the majority of other allegedly secular republics.

Lalu Dyavappa and Rathod P.B. wrote about secularism and Indian constitutions in their article "Secularism and Indian Constitutions" from 2014. They made an effort to show how crucial the Indian Constitution and secularism are to building a peaceful society. The study covered



secularism's operation in accordance with the Indian Constitution. The Indian constitution recognised secularism under the terms of articles 25 to 28 since India is fundamentally a secular state that accords respect to all religions. As a result, nobody has the authority to declare their religion to be the official religion. They came to the conclusion that since there is a written constitution declaring India to be a secular state, it is the duty of every Indian to defend and uphold this assertion. Secularism ultimately begins in each individual's heart. There shouldn't be a feeling of "otherness" because we all share a shared past. India has so far managed to preserve the secular nature of its policies, despite being a traditional nation with many customs that have their origins in the various religions that call this area home. Last but not least, before the 42nd Amendment, which was enacted in the preamble in 1976, secularism was absent from the Indian Constitution.

In his article "Religion Media and Cultural Diversity," which was written for and published as a section for Jupp et al (eds) Encyclopedia of Religion in Australia, the sociologist Andrew Jakubowicz defined religion as "a social process that necessarily depends on communication, through which it can call communities of faith into being and sustain them over time." According to what he said, if religious belief is to be seen in this context as a subset of more general cultural mores, research on the media and cultural variety is helpful in identifying some of the fundamental issues with the interaction between media and religion.

Most media scholars agree that today's media play important roles in bringing cultural groups together. Jakubowicz contends that access to common media organs, which allow for the promotion and testing of ideas and values as well as the relevance and practical application of morality stories, makes it possible for these networks of connection to occur in addition to face-to-face interactions. Therefore, one of the main topics of research on media and religion is content and its potential interpretation. Many religious institutions own and operate their own media. Religious media has traditionally had two functions: to support a specific religion and to disparage other religions. International research on religion and media addresses a variety of issues, including the discussion of religion, politics, and the media, the media's function as a venue for the re-sacralization of the modern world, religious authority and the mediation of knowledge in secular societies, particular religions and their representation in the media, and the rise in the West and their use of media.

The concept of secularism has been heavily debated in relation to India. There are many books and articles about that. Renowned filmmaker Shyam Benegal also wrote about secularism looking at how it has been portrayed in popular Indian cinema. (Benegal S, 2007)

Secularism & Media

"Media Portrayals of Religion and the Secular Sacred," a book by Kim Knott, Elizabeth Poole, and Teemu Taira, focuses on how the media marginalises one religion at the detriment of another. Is it accurate to say that Islam and not Christianity are marginalised by the mainstream media? This is the central query of the book. Are the major media hostile to Islam?

The book makes the notion that, despite a drop in religious involvement in Europe, religions appear to be growing more visible and influential in society, and that the role of the media should be closely scrutinised. Based on their analysis of mainstream media, the writers looked at how religion and modern secular ideas are covered and represented in British media. They also conducted research using data from the 1980s and the years 2008–10 to determine what has changed over the past 25 years. (Knott Kim et al, 2013)

These researchers looked at how common beliefs and behaviours, as well as representations of Christianity and public life, Islam and religious pluralism, atheism and secularism, were presented. A thorough examination of media coverage of events like the Papal visit to the UK in 2010 and some others revealed that religion is "deeply embedded in the language and images of



the press and television, and present in all types of coverage from news and documentaries to entertainment, sports reporting, and advertising" (ibid).

In their standards of conduct, AIR and Doordarshan, two public broadcasters, have taken on the responsibility of promoting the constitutional idea of secularism. On the other hand, it appears that the administration continues to adhere to the secularist equidistance viewpoint. According to Anand, the term "secularism" should be used in at least two distinct situations (2011).

As a start, it might indicate complete dissociation from all religions. The Constitutional Theory of Secularism is a moniker frequently used to describe the second concept. The humanistic values outlined in the numerous provisions of the Indian Constitution are promoted by this ideology.

Anand claimed that the implications of secularism for the print media also began with bemoaning the ambiguity around the term and went on to assert that a policy of equal respect had often resulted in disrespect for the progressive ideas associated with secularism.

Rustom Bharucha investigated the connection between cultural politics and activism in the context of a larger fight and the place of secularism in a world that is becoming more communal in his writing. He has specifically examined this subject in light of the Ayodhya debate, in which secularism occasionally took on a communal tinge. He clarifies that the two concepts should not be used interchangeably since doing so would limit communalism's potential and answers the question of why secularism is opposed to communalism.

Rajeeb Bhargava has put forth many states in a variety of shapes. According to him, there may be five different kinds of states. Three categories can be used to further categorize theocratic states and states with only one official religion. The first is a state with a single church, while the third is a state with multiple churches. The final form of state is a secular one. He continues by claiming that in a secular state, there are three levels of disconnections: the first level is at the level of ends, the second level is at the level of institutions, and the third level is at the level of law and public policy.

The majority of people in south Asian nations practise one or more distinct religions, making it difficult for the government to enact effective policy, and this makes T.N. Madan believe that secularism is an unrealistic goal in those societies. According to him, secularism is impossible in south Asian countries and is thought to be the fantasy of a small minority that idealises the majority and tries to change history but is helpless to do so in a society that is controlled democratically. He continues by saying that some countries uphold particular faiths like Buddhism and Islam. No state action can maintain neutrality or equivalence since the opinions of the minority do not always correspond to those of the majority.

A brief explanation of the secular state was given in Donald E. Smith's book "India a Secular State," published in 1963. When outlining the core principles and organisational framework of secularism, Smith claimed in his book that it was based on three interconnected sets of interactions between the individual, religion, and state. First, a relationship between an individual and their faith in which the state does not take part. A secular person and society, according to Smith, are those in which religion is not permitted. According to Smith, regardless of one's affiliation with a particular religion, a person must be considered a citizen by a secular state. He also stated emphatically that a straightforward divide did not guarantee religious freedom. The separation of church and state, in Smith's opinion, implies the institutionalization of religious freedom and the state's impartiality in questions of religion.

In his 1871 book *The Fundamentals of Secularism Illustrated*, George Jacob Holyoake discussed the origins of the secular movement in Europe as well as the meaning and implications of the term. In order to understand how secularism took root in Europe in the middle of the 19th century, the book provides a philosophical and political context. The author provided examples of how secularism developed as an alternative to atheism in order to communicate the core



principles of the free thought movement. He continued by saying that secularism was not an anti-religious worldview but rather one that placed an emphasis on acting in good faith and with restraint in the present, in accordance with natural law. This, according to Holyoake, is the shared morality that endures in a secular society in spite of potential ideological divisions.

A critical history of secularism in western civilisation and how it conquered religion was presented in Talal Asad's 2003 book *The genesis of secular, Christianity, Islam, and Modernity*. From a variety of academic fields, including history, literature, moral philosophy, politics, psychology, religion studies, and sociology, the book offers critical critiques of secularism concept and practice.

Secularism was the subject of scholarly discussions in the 2004 book *Secularism and its Critics* by Rajeev Bhargava for the theme in the politics series. In particular, in the dynamic context of south Asia's multi-religious society and minority rights, it addresses the most pressing questions, such as how secularism applies to non-Western civilizations.

The majority of Charles Taylor's 2007 book, *A Secular Age*, is devoted to discussing the evolution of secularism throughout history and highlighting the distinct path that helped to build current western secularism. The hand is susceptible to modifications and alterations as it transitions from one environment or culture to another. Taylor argued, however, that western secularity should be seen as the outcome of a fundamental change in human reason that pointed towards disenchantment with the systematic suppression of the magical aspects of religion as well as by an associated historical movement towards individual adherence to true religion.

By using historical analysis, C.S. Adcock's 2014 book *The Limit of Tolerance, Indian Secularism and the Politics of Religious Freedom* investigates how the secularist ideal of tolerance functions politically in India. It looks at religious freedom within the context of proselytizing and non-proselytizing that acted as a critique of secularism. The Freedom of Faith Act's supporters assert that proselytizing affects social harmony since their religion is accepting and "non-proselytizing." A critical perspective on the connection between tolerance and the secularism practised in India is also provided in the book.

The book "Europe, India and the limit of secularism" by Jakob De Roover, published in 2015, discusses the contemporary relationship between politics and religion and emphasizes the crisis and limit of secularism. Both in the context of non-Western society and in European society, the book explored the dilemma of liberal secularism brought on by altering religious populations. The freedom of religion, equality, governmental neutrality, and the division between the private and public spheres are among the liberal secularist ideas that are critiqued. In order to define what constitutes a religious sphere, it also analyses intellectual flows within liberal secularism.

Rethinking Secularism, a collection of essays by Craig Calhoun and others, is an interdisciplinary approach that offers a full study and application of numerous secularisms around the world. In this book, contemporary philosopher Charles Taylor provides a historical location and description of western secularism. Sociologist Casanova contrasted between the concepts of secularisation and secularism and demonstrated how these conceptions had a significant impact on social processes, claiming that the false secularism that banned religion from public life was the false secularism. He proposed a point when secularism and religion collide in the context of various social solidarities.

The Problem of this Study:

All these discussions on secularism and print media, if hold any currency, then who owns the newspaper and who reads the newspaper should not have any correlation of particular community affiliation.

The purpose of this study is to ascertain if newspapers are perceived as agencies of secular media outlets by their readers or not.



Since there were two most important daily publications in the region under study, during 2014-15, each owned by an owner belonging to two major communities of the Barak Valley, and the readers (i.e. population) is also mostly from those two major communities, this study aimed to examine how community identity and a secular outlook are complexly represented, both implicitly and explicitly, in the perceptions of the readers of the two major daily publications in the Barak Valley in 2014-15.

The study, which was perhaps the first of its kind, looks at how this issue of secularism is perceived by the readers in Cachar district of Assam. The survey was also done at that time as part of a doctoral study of the author.

Objectives:

1. To examine how those two major newspapers are perceived by readers from different communities.
2. To see if such community specific endorsement of neutrality ascribed to the two newspapers are related to ownership.

Research Questions:

1. If community specific news is published in similar measure by two most important dailies of Barak Valley, or there is community specific bias in gate keeping perceived by the Readers?
2. Is there any relation of the community of the Newspaper owners and their readers' endorsement of the neutrality of the newspaper as far as their perception is concerned?

Data and Methodology

In order to better understand how two well-known Bengali newspapers from the Barak Valley are perceived by the readers, the study employed a Readers' perception study.

Geographical area of Study

The southern Assamese region known as the Barak Valley got its name from the principal river flowing through the valley. It is constituted by three districts: Cachar, Karimganj, and Hailakandi. Its total area is 6922 square kilometres. The valley is bordered on the western, northern, eastern, and southern sides by Bangladesh, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, and Tripura. According to the Census of 1991, the population was 24, 91,546. According to the 1971 Census Report, Bengalis made up over 80% of the population. At the time, there were 17,43,400 people living there. Of those, 13, 32,200 were Bengali. Hindi was spoken by 1,01,500 people, including 1,150,000 Manipuri, 9,200 Dhimasa, 6,800 Ahomia, Naga, and Mizo (Statistical Handbook, Assam, 1992).

There are several prospects in the Barak Valley, which is today a fully developed area. There are resources available here for education at all levels, from elementary school to college. A number of institutions, including Central University, National Institute of Technology, Medical College, Research Center, Agricultural Training Institute, etc., cater to the needs of this area. One airport also connects this remote region with the rest of the country. Additionally, there are established radio and television stations in this region. The administrative hub of the Cachar district is Silchar, a developed city in the Barak Valley. The valley is a resource-rich area and one of the most heavily populated areas in the country.

THE NEWSPAPERS

The two most important newspapers of the valley were selected after taking into account their circulation. Let these be denoted as Newspaper "A" and Newspaper "B" here, instead of naming those specifically, for the sensitiveness of the topic.



Newspaper “A” was one of the most widely read regional newspapers in North East India and in Assam. Newspaper “B” came a close second in circulation after Newspaper “A”.

Newspaper “A” is owned by an owner from community “X”, who are also having festival “x” as the biggest festival of the year.

Newspaper “B” is owned by an owner from community “Y”, who are also having festival “y” as the biggest festival of the year.

The readers of both newspapers are from both community, “X” and “Y”.

Analysis of Data

In the survey conducted by this author on Readers’ Perception, the two major communities of the valley got almost equally distributed through random sampling. However, the sample size was rather small (total only 134 to mention), and only readers of a newspaper was confirmed as a sample as the survey was on Readers Perception only.

In fact, the sample quite represents the community wise demography of the valley, with the majority community having 50.75%, minority community having 48.5%, and others having 00.75% representation. In real life demography, the others are little higher than this, but for the two major communities, this was quite reflective of the demographic picture of the valley.

	Community	Number	%
1	“X”	68	50.75
2	“Y”	65	48.50
3	“Z”	1	00.75
	Total	134	100.00

Out of 134 sample readers, 125 readers subscribed to either one or both Newspapers under study. It is interesting to note that readers of both newspapers are almost double of the figure for subscriber of both newspapers, indicating huge number of cross subscription readership. This is indication of non-rigid affiliation in matters of reading the other newspaper one does not subscribe to. Distribution pattern of their subscription and readership is presented in the table below:

	Readership	Number	%
1	Reader of Newspaper “A”	45	33.6
2	Reader of Newspaper “B”	17	12.7
3	Reader of Newspaper both “A” & “B”	70	52.2
4	Reader of Other Newspapers	2	01.5
	Total	134	100

From the readership data, we can make out that a proportion of 85.8% of the readers read “A” (115) newspaper, while the total proportion reading “B” newspaper is 65.9% (87).

	Subscription	Number	%
1	Subscription of Newspaper “A”	72	57.6
2	Subscription of Newspaper “B”	46	36.8
3	Subscription of Newspaper both “A” & “B”	5	04.0
4	Subscription of Other Newspapers	2	01.6
	Total	125	100.0



Similarly, from the subscription data we find out that 61.6% subscribe to Newspaper “A” while 40.8% subscribe to Newspaper “B”. The interesting fact of cross-subscription readership of Barak Valley is well reflected here where subscriber of one newspaper reads the other newspaper as well from some other subscriber to a great extent as presented in the following table:

	Newspaper	Subscriber	Reader
1	“A”	61.6%	85.8%
2	“B”	40.8%	65.9%

Having the readership and subscription data with us, we shall now move to the most contentious issue: what is the perception of the sample readers about coverage of the newspapers of different community festival. Here, we have to remember that Newspaper “A” by ownership is more akin to have a bias “x” or “X”, and “B” will be akin to bias “y” and “Y”.

Table 5 presents Readers combined perception of coverage of festivals “x” and “y” which represents community “X” and community “Y” respectively, by Newspapers “A” and “B”.

Similarly, Table 6 presents the combined perception of all news related to community “X” and “Y” in the Newspapers “A” and “B”.

	YES	MAY BE	DON'T KNOW	NO	Total
Newspaper “A”	90	34	5	5	134
Newspaper “B”	81	45	6	2	134

	YES	MAY BE	DON'T KNOW	NO	Total
Newspaper “A”	94	22	9	9	134
Newspaper “B”	82	35	9	8	134

However, the picture changes when we analyze the same data on the basis of Community of the Readers. Neutrality of Newspaper “A” is then endorsed by Community “X” readers more than Community “Y”, and Newspaper “B” is endorsed by lot more readers of Community “Y” than “A” (Table 8).

Row Labels	YES	MAY BE	I DON'T KNOW	NO	Total
“X”	49 (72.0%)	16	2	1	68
“Y”	40 (61.5%)	18	3	4	65
“Z”	1				1
Total	90 (67.1%)	34	5	5	134



Table 8: If Newspaper “B” covers “x” and “y” with equal importance

	Community	YES	MAY BE	I DON'T KNOW	NO	Total
1	“X”	33 (48.5%)	28	6	1	68
2	“Y”	47 (72.3%)	17		1	65
3	“Z”	1				1
4	Total	81	45	6	2	134

This absence of a trust of neutrality about a certain media house is clearer when perception of community neutrality is estimated. As presented in Table 9 and 10, Newspaper “A” is declared neutral by 76% of Community “X”, whereas only 63% of Community “B” agrees to that.

Table 9: If Newspaper “A” covers “X” and “Y” with equal importance

	Reader of Community	YES	MAY BE	I DON'T KNOW	NO	Grand Total
1	“X”	52 (76%)	9	3	4	68
2	“Y”	41 (63%)	13	6	5	65
3	“Z”	1				1
4	Total	94	22	9	9	134

In case of Newspaper “B”, only 44% of Community “X” endorse its neutrality, whereas 78% of Community “Y” upholds its’ neutrality.

Table 10: If Newspaper “B” covers “X” and “Y” with equal importance

		YES	MAY BE	I DON'T KNOW	NO	Total
1	“X”	30 (44%)	23	9	6	68
2	“Y”	51 (78%)	12	0	2	65
3	“Z”	1	0	0		1
4	Total	82	35	9	8	134

Table 11 summarizes and strengthens the above findings in a more specific term below:

Table 11: Ownership and Endorsement of Neutrality by Community

		Newspaper A	Newspaper B
	Ownership	Community “X”	Community “Y”
1	Neutrality Endorsement of Community “X”	76%	44%
2	Neutrality Endorsement of Community “Y”	63%	78%

It is clear from the data of Table 11 that Community “X” readers prefer Newspaper “A”, which is owned by an owner of Community “X” more than the readers of Community “Y”, who prefer Newspaper “B” owned by an owner of Community “Y” and less preferred by Community “X” readers. And this paradox is prevailing despite a high degree of cross readership over subscription of the two major newspapers of Barak Valley during 2014-15.

Conclusion

Since a secular press should not have any bearing of the ownership on the readership pattern, the



clear discernable trend of community wise preference in considering the neutrality of the two major newspapers of Barak Valley during 2014-15, on the basis of community specific prevalence of endorsement of neutrality of Newspapers according to the community of their ownership, we can conclude that all is not well in the state of Denmark, i.e. secular press in the Barak Valley. Community “X” readers prefer Newspaper “A”, which is owned by an owner of Community “X” more than the readers of Community “Y”, who prefer Newspaper “B” owned by an owner of Community “Y” and less preferred by Community “X” readers, despite a high degree of cross readership over subscription of the two major newspapers of Barak Valley during 2014-15.

The results of the case study thus show, secularism as a practice by the Newspapers is questioned by the choice and perception of their readers themselves. A further analysis of the related content may throw further light on the related critical issues.

The readers’ perception of the newspapers they read and prefer as neutral is somewhat biased by their community identity, or rather by the identity of the owners, certainly reflects a non-secular environment of the media therein.

Even if this is not the case of national media scenario, for fringe areas dominated by the regional newspapers, this should be a major area to look for further scrutiny.

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