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**A MANAGEMENT CASE ON *PRANTIK* – THE ASSAMESE FORTNIGHTLY**

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## PREFACE

This is an endeavour to encourage research in diverse areas of human interest in the context of the community and society. This research activity underlines not only latest academic excursions into the world of ideas but underscores its pragmatic possibilities and applied relevance. While poverty is a pan-Indian reality, it is discrimination and inequality which demand proactive measures. These things can be addressed by different media and there is an intrepid exemplar in an Assamese fortnightly Prantik, a socio-literary journal that has stood the test of time and created a niche in the popular Assamese mind. Education exploiting the available technologies with a view to making it accessible to all is the thrust of technologically equipped societies. This necessary emphasis is highlighted in papers dealing with, among others, our own institution of open education, KKHSOU.

The focus of the papers ranges from alternative journalism to distance education to ethical media exploitation and the ubiquitous discriminations practiced in the Indian scene and the inequalities which continue with different faces. Reality in India continues to be religious and communal by and large. The divine juxtaposed with the carnivalesque can definitely yield fresh insights into our reality. Even after owning the persistence of discrimination and inequalities, the identification and appropriation of spaces in the context of ethnic assertion and identity have also been adequately looked into in one of the papers. This is quite close to the existing exclusivity of even trade union organisations in certain sensitive areas like tea estates. The sad annals of tea and its commodification in Assam by the colonisers had only been added to by native planters till certain initiatives taken by the government. In the perspective of the socialist democratic polity, all organisations especially dealing with labour must be entirely inclusive. This aspect is also emphasized in one of the papers.

The papers are distinct because of a holistic exploitation of the available means of education and learning and the faith that informs them is accessibility and inclusivity. This is no utopian wish but a pragmatic reality in institutions like ours which challenge discrimination and not only advocate but practice accessibility. This is a humble step which I believe is in the right direction. While acknowledging the individual efforts of the researchers, I also would like to congratulate them on their emphasis on realities which are not merely academic but which inform our very existence as individuals and as members of the community.

Dr. Arupjyoti Choudhury  
Dean (Academic), KKHSOU

## A note from the Author

In simple terms, management case is a description of a management situation. The length of a case may vary from one page to several pages. In some cases, to present quantitative and analytical data and information, exhibits and figures are provided. All these information provide the required inputs for case analysis. While reading and analysing the case, the reader should try to find out the management problem in the case. A case is not written to illustrate correct or incorrect handling of an administrative situation. There is no bias towards a particular conclusion. The analysis should be rational, free from bias.

Management cases are used to help developing an analytical bent of mind of the participants of management programmes. The emphasis is on analysis and exposure to decision making in real life organizational situations. The learners should try to identify the main problem and the key issues, search for the decision alternatives and should try to contemplate measures towards solving the management problem.

The management case on Prantik has been prepared with the above in view. The author acknowledges help and cooperation received from Sri Pradip Baruah, the Editor-Publisher of Prantik and his editorial team; the participants of focus group discussion series, industry observers, stakeholders of Prantik, reviewers of the management case and the language editor.

Nripendra Narayan Sarma

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# A MANAGEMENT CASE ON *PRANTIK* – THE ASSAMESE FORTNIGHTLY

## Abstract

For the emergence of new media vehicles, the media habits of people in general have changed a lot, more specifically in the context of print magazines through vernacular media. In an industry where mortality rate is high, Prantik, an Assamese fortnightly, has been doing well since 1981 by providing relevant info-edutainment materials to Assamese families. Despite the massive changes in the environment, demographics and the readership preferences, the basic character of the magazine has not changed. The magazine has not faced the threat of survival. The editor-publisher of Prantik feels that his magazine must continue its journey despite its dwindled sales. No dependence on advertising income is a unique strategy of the magazine. Readership subscription is the only source of revenue for the single product publication house. Readership loyalty and stakeholder relationship management aspects are noteworthy. Should the editor/publisher of Prantik adopt a new strategy to meet the changing requirements of time or consolidate on the existing one so as to reach a larger number of readers and expand the base of loyal readers?

**Keywords:** *Prantik, Assamese fortnightly, vernacular magazine, social responsiveness, sustainability*

## 1. Introduction

The year was 1981. The Assam agitation for deportation of foreigners was in full swing and a wide majority of the native population was driven by a feeling of regional chauvinism. The state and its people were in turmoil. The need of the hour was to rejuvenate the Assamese people with clear logic and radical thinking instead of wallowing in emotion and sentimental rhetoric. Mr. Pradip Baruah, owner of a small letter press and screen printing press, with a professional qualification of printing technology and work experience in the family business of newspaper publications; felt that a magazine with suitable content would be able to help in changing the scenario of excessive emotion and sentimentalism. It was a time when even a reasoned dissent or a word of caution was not tolerated by the supporters of the agitation. In those tumultuous

times, when even established institutions were shaky about future prospects, Mr. Baruah took the bold step of introducing a fortnightly with the aim of providing reasoned and socially responsive info-edutainment writing of various genres. He envisioned that a fortnightly magazine might prove useful in filling the vacuum created by the cessation in publication of the monthly magazine 'Ramdhenu' edited by Dr. Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya, the first Jnanpeeth award winner of Assam.

A team of carefully chosen personnel was formed and eminent figures in Assamese journalism and literature were approached to contribute regular columns for the proposed publication. A 'dummy' was prepared for a 48 page magazine which was to be totally different from the conventional Assamese periodicals of the time. It was contemplated that the magazine would be 'a necessary magazine for every Assamese family'. The ball was set rolling with the members of the team comprising of three promising fresh graduates travelling to different corners of Assam to gather feedback from a cross-section of people. It was going to be a very daunting and extremely challenging task. The mortality rate of Assamese periodicals was very high. It required a qualified, eminent and competent personality to handle the challenges with panache.

At that time, Dr. Bhabendra Nath Saikia, a noted litterateur, academic and filmmaker was relieved of the responsibility of Chairman, Railway Service Commission, Guwahati. Mr. Baruah approached Dr. Saikia to be the Chief Editor of the magazine; he himself remaining the editor for all practical purposes i.e. acting as a buffer providing the safety cushion to the Chief Editor while dealing with Government, legal issues etc. Dr. Saikia accepted the offer and Prantik was launched in December 1981. Prantik weathered the turbulence. However, within a short period of five months, so great was the acceptance of the magazine and enthusiasm of the people that the circulation figure touched the 10,000 mark, a highly respectable figure in Assam. The fortnightly was ably managed by Dr. Saikia up to 15<sup>th</sup> November 1997. The ideas and standards set by Dr. Saikia and the legacy left by him; the love and loyalty of readers who call themselves the members of Prantik family; the writers and the sellers have sustained the fortnightly for thirty five years. Mr. Baruah feels that the role of the editorial team is catalytic only. The journey is carrying on with a sense of satisfaction to



all concerned although the magazine has not registered a worthwhile increase in circulation.

## **2. The Product**

Mr. Baruah, born in 1938, trained in printing technology in England and Russia in 1950s and 1960s, had several years of experience in the family business of printing and publication. The family concern had several publications in English and Assamese. These included daily newspapers, weeklies and yearly journals. A fortnightly was not there. The publications were pioneers and market leaders in their respective product categories. He left the family business in the late 1970s and started his own business of printing. He was seriously thinking of launching a fortnightly that would not be a purely literary/science/sports/cultural magazine. A magazine should be commercially viable, socially responsive and should be able to provide the mental nutrition – that was his initial idea. The idea worked. Prantik today is one of the very few longest surviving Assamese magazines. It brings contemporary thoughts through editorials, articles and literary pieces. The range of its contents cover the endangered herbs, birds, animals, medicinal plants, politics, science, health, poetry, novel, short stories with vivid sketches, art, Sudoku etc. *Annexure 1* gives the summary of a typical issue of Prantik. On 8<sup>th</sup> April, 1987, one Ms. Sumitra Hazarika visited the office of Prantik and suggested adding a feature on women. Mr. Baruah stated that the entire magazine should be read as a women’s magazine.

Some of the most popular novels and autobiographies in Assamese literature were first serially published in Prantik. The writings of the founder editor-in-chief were a treasure for Prantik and Assamese literature. ‘The Last Page’ containing excerpts of the daily dairies of late Dr. Saikia, who expired in 2003, is still very popular. Prantik publishes a widely popular feature called ‘Patralaap’ i.e. conversation through letters. The spontaneous feedback of the readers on the features published helps the editorial team to keep track of readers’ preferences. Moreover, publication of contact numbers and addresses of the writers help the formation and sustenance of the Prantik family on its own. One reader once commented that Prantik was always keen to transcend beyond frontiers (*pranta*). He was highly fascinated by the feature on exhibition of art work, regularly

published on the inside back cover. One reader commented that Prantik could enrich lives of the ones who are honest and positive despite the negativity in the environment. Mr. Baruah felt overwhelmed with the feedback received from the readers which went beyond his expectations. Rather, he felt doubly responsible for the only product that he had to offer to the sensible readers.

The 65 plus page magazine is printed in Guwahati in multiple colour and is liberally illustrated. The size of the periodical is 27 cm x 20 cm, printed area being 24 cm x17 cm. The periodicals in the market differ widely in content, quality of paper and use of colour. Prantik is priced at Rs. 30 per copy. It is printed on white newsprint and the cover pages are printed on glazed art paper. Vanitha, a Malayalam fortnightly is the market leader in the fortnightly category in India. With glossy printing, Vanitha is priced at Rs. 25 per copy for about 135 pages, advertisement pages being around 60. The weight of Prantik is 113gm, while Vanitha weighs 208gm.

### **3. Market, Competition and Environment**

India is home to several hundred languages. Most Indians speak the language belonging to the families of Indo-Aryans (74%), the Dravidians (24%) and others (2%). Assamese is an Eastern Indo Aryan language used mainly in the state of Assam where it is the official language. Assamese serves as a *lingua franca* of the region. However, the percentage of speakers of Assamese language to the country's total population declined from 1.58 in 1991 to 1.28 in 2001. It was 1.63 in the year 1971. In 1981, no census was conducted in Assam because of the Assam agitation. Speakers of Assamese have become a minority in the State. Though they continue to be the single largest population group, their percentage has been reduced to less than 50. The language data for 2001 shows that the percentage of Assamese speakers declined from 57.81 per cent recorded in the 1991 Census to 48.80 per cent. On the other hand the percentage of Bengali speakers increased from 21.67 per cent to 27.54 per cent. The number of Bodo speakers in Assam in the 2001 census was 1,296,162 against a total number of 1,350,478 Bodo speakers in the entire country.

According to one study, India had 780 living languages of which 220 languages have vanished in the last 50 years, the main reason being lack of speakers and adoption of 'strong' language. Mahatma Gandhi wrote in 1928 in an essay on: 'Young India', "Surely, it is a self demonstrated proposition that the youth of a nation cannot keep or establish a living contact with the masses unless their knowledge is received and assimilated through a medium understood by the people." UNESCO has also advocated about learning through mother language. For 91.5% of the world population, English is not the mother language. "We have not allowed our mother language to develop. We are living in a hybrid culture. How can we expect that our language and culture will survive at the hands of the generation who are not familiar with it?"- Harekrishna Deka, a leading Assamese litterateur and a retired bureaucrat expressed this concern in an Assamese daily.

In 1970s, when an Assamese litterateur Hem Baruah wrote a travelogue on the Mekong countries, it sold 10,000 copies. Today, an award winning novel does not sell more than 20,000 copies with multiple editions. Exceptions are also there. A revised edition of *Burhi Aair Sadhu*, the first collection of folk stories (1911), sold like hot cakes when it was revised and rewritten in simplified language and shorter sentences. This indicates that the younger generation which has grown up in the age of digital media and television would still read books in their mother tongue if presented in the way they like. With a very optimistic mind, a magazine called 'Samakaal' was launched, but it closed down within six months. Another fortnightly called 'Pashek' was launched by a leading publisher with a renowned figure in Assamese journalism. This also did not survive. The women, literary and family magazines of Assam are sold by the publishers of major dailies in the state. The publishers can enjoy the cost and distribution advantages and hence, they are not very concerned about the profitability and strategic importance of the non-daily publications. The market leader in the Assamese periodical segment publishes horror and detective stories, popular feature on cinema etc. The newspaper hawker of one locality in Guwahati mentioned that a housing colony having 25 units and Assamese people living in it subscribed to five Assamese dailies only. None subscribed to any Assamese magazine. The rapid growth of urbanization has eroded the traditional values and habits. The

real growth for periodicals exists in the smaller towns and villages where people still have a slower pace of life and can enjoy leisure reading.

In addition to Prantik, there are children's magazines, women's magazines, magazines with horror and detective stories etc. *Annexure 2* gives a brief account of periodicals available in the state. The dailies far outsell the periodicals. The *Tables (Nos. 1 to 7)* indicate the availability and readership of newspapers and periodicals in selected states and languages of the country.

During the journey so far, Prantik has witnessed the famous Assam agitation, complications in the post Assam Accord phases, rise and fall of militancy, economic reforms in the country, large scale proliferation of English medium schools, the advent of TV, mobile phones, video games, internet, WhatsApp etc. Though Prantik is not targeted specifically at children, experience indicates that children of about 10 to 14 years also read and enjoy Prantik. The number of students appearing for the state high school leaving certificate examination each year in Assam is estimated to be around 3.8 lakh, out of which 60% appear through Assamese medium. There are more than 500 provincialised colleges and 14 universities in Assam in addition to the educational institutions in the private sector. All these indicate great sales potential. However, the reality is different.

With the advent of the new age media vehicles, the print magazines in India (and Assam as well) are facing problems in retaining readership and increasing circulation. Although Prantik is a unique product in its own category, it cannot defy competition. Price and cost to the customer is also important. Magazines face the competitive threat from newspapers because in addition to the news value, they provide features and infotainment material to different sections with various weekly supplements. Newspapers are competitors to magazines. But it is not vice versa. The readership base of magazines is shrinking all over, especially in vernacular serious magazine category. 'India Today' which was a weekly magazine, decided to convert to fortnightly. Similar was the case with 'Desh', the famous Bengali magazine.

#### **4. Price and Distribution**

Prantik is distributed through a system of agents (95 in nos.) and sub agents (about 270 in nos.), located in all important places of the state in addition to some places in Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya. Prantik sells the magazine to the agents and the agents sell the magazine to the sub agents and the book stalls. In May, 2016, the agents sold from a maximum of 4700 copies (Ankur Agencies in Jorhat, Assam) to 10 copies (Patrika House in Karimganj in Barak Valley of southern Assam, a Bengali inhabited area). The top seven distributors sold about 15,000 copies. Two of them sold about 3000 copies in Guwahati. The other five distributors were in Nagaon, Jorhat, Dibrugarh and Tezpur. Nagaon and Tezpur are in central Assam. Jorhat and Dibrugarh are in upper Assam while Guwahati is in lower Assam. In a place called Mehsana in Gujarat, Prantik was distributed through an agent. It was learnt that the agent overpriced 90 copies of Prantik in one fortnight. Hence the practice was discontinued and the subscribers in the place were sent Prantik through direct mail at a discounted rate. A high proportion of sales (about 70%) of Prantik are affected through door delivery at the subscribers' premises and this was done by agents/sub agents through hawkers. However, this depends on availability of major book stalls as they also sell Prantik collected from the agents/sub agents. For example, in a place called Mirza in the outskirts of Guwahati, in May 2016, 80 copies of Prantik were sold - 30 by hawkers and 50 by the book stalls. Jyoti Book House (of Mirza) alone sold 35 copies. This book stall used to sell more than 100 copies of Prantik in the early 2000s. They sold 70 copies each of 'Priya Sakhi' and 'Nandini', two Assamese magazines mainly targeted at women readers in May 2016. The book stalls cater to the occasional readers in addition to their regular customers.

Prantik is sold through direct mail also. Prantik is home delivered to about 200 regular subscribers in Guwahati without inconveniencing the normal work load of the delivery personnel. This is done to keep a personal touch and also to take care of the complaint of non receipt of the magazine by the normal post. There are about 3,500 direct subscribers of Prantik spread all over the country and the world. The yearly rate of subscription for one year in Nepal, Bangladesh and Bhutan was Rs. 550 in May, 2016. For other countries the rate is Rs.2100, as the

postal charge is about Rs. 60 or more. There is a pricing scheme with adequate discount for subscription up to three years. Majority avail the yearly subscription only.

All other competing vernacular magazines are priced at more than Rs. 30, the price of Prantik, Gariyasi being the only exception. Gariyasi, a literary and prestigious magazine, is an additional publication from a major newspaper publisher of the state. The agents of Prantik are given commission slab wise: 35% for more than 1000 copies; 33% for copies between 500 to 1000; 30% for copies from 200 to 500 and 25% for less than 200 copies. Prantik bears the despatch cost. The first issue of the month normally sells more (about 5%) than the second issue.

Mr. Utpal Datta, a keen observer of print media, stated that Prantik had created a new direction in the distribution system of Assamese magazine. The selling agents of Prantik of 1980s are now established enterprises. Mr. Deben Saikia of Rumi Rupak Enterprise, an old agent of Prantik and distributor of some other periodicals in Nagaon in central Assam, mentioned about the downward trend of sales of Assamese magazines due to the advent of technology based new devices. According to him, Prantik was least affected. They are very happy with the long standing business dealings with Prantik. Most of the Assamese magazines had to close down for non payment of outstanding dues by agents, excessive printing and return of unsold copies. Prantik is printed as per the requisition received from the agents. As a policy, unsold copies are not taken back, however damaged copies are replaced. The incidence of damage is also very less as the packages are carefully handled in the preferred mode of transport suggested by the agents. From the reports submitted to Registrar of Newspapers, it was found that during the period 1982 to 2016, the average difference between the print copies and the sold copies was 954. These unsold copies were used as complimentary copies to contributors to the magazine, donation to libraries, damage replacement, sale of old issues in book fairs at various places of Assam, retention for record etc. Even the established publishers of national level magazines take back the unsold copies with a proof of the cover page cutting. Extension of credit is a practice of the industry. Prantik has not followed the crowd. In case of Prantik, agents like MP Book Stall and Durga News Agency of Guwahati, Kitap Ghar in Pathsala paid in advance in May, 2016. Others normally

clear the payment within a fortnight. Prantik owes a lot to its sellers. The agents suggest measures regarding packaging and despatch. Most of the despatch is made by public transport and night bus services. One or two agents sometimes create problems but that is insignificant. Prantik is very happy with the support and cooperation received from the agents.

In one discussion, Mrs. Luna Lahkar said that Prantik was great, she loved it too; but she did not have the time to get it from the book stall as the magazine was not home delivered by the news paper hawker.

## **5. Revenue, cost and promotion**

Along with the young and highly enthusiastic team, Dr Saikia, the Editor-in-Chief and Mr. Pradip Baruah, the editor-publisher of Prantik got so deeply involved that the circulation of Prantik reached an enviable figure of 10,000 within a few months of its inception. With the growth in circulation, advertisements from numerous commercial organizations started pouring in to such an extent, that at times it became impossible to accommodate them at one go. Prantik also had the distinction of being the first publication in Assam to print advertisements in colour. The content was provided by the advertisers. Prantik did not have any control over the use of language in the advertisements and also to check the authenticity of the claims of the advertisers. Prantik is highly regarded for its honesty and editorial policy in ensuring accuracy of language in its content. The advertisements had to be compatible with the image of the magazine. The loyal readers expressed resentment on the publication of the advertisements. They considered the ads to be an intrusion in their reading. An overseas subscriber wanted to offer a donation so as to compensate for the loss of ad-revenue. A number of readers suggested increasing the price. Prantik was possibly the only magazine in India to resign from ABC (Audit Bureau of Circulation), a body whose certified figures of circulation are relied on by the advertisers. This happened in 1997. Moreover, Mr. Baruah did not like the trade practices of the advertising world. He wanted to carry forward a clean and dignified business. A decision was taken that Prantik would not carry commercial advertisements at the cost of reading matter. Initially Prantik consisted of 48 pages priced at Rs. 3. Price

of the magazine had to be increased to meet up the corresponding increase in cost several times in its journey without facing any resentment from its readers. In March 2016, Prantik consisted of 67 pages with two pages of advertisements on recently released books only. If required, Prantik would insist that the book publishers/authors give a copy of the book to be examined by the editorial team. As a policy, they decided not to publish advertisements of books on sure success etc. They released advertisements of books keeping in view the taste of their readers. In 2014-15, it received Rs. 1.45 lakh from advertisements against Rs. 62 thousand in 2013-14.

With an assured subscription and a loyal readership base, the magazine could adopt a unique and reader friendly, no advertising strategy. Profitability has not been a concern for no dependence on advertising income. A manager of a local daily commented in a discussion that revenue from circulation could provide them the cost of the newsprint and advertisements in the daily could give them the profit after meeting all other expenses. Prantik did not believe on imposition of advertisements. Not only did it refuse advertisements, it decided not to advertise itself as it was akin to blowing one's own trumpet. The sensible readers promoted the magazine themselves. The contents were discussed amongst readers and Prantik gained word-of-mouth publicity. If some book stalls wished to have a signboard, Prantik would provide that. If requested, Prantik would sponsor advertisements for some souvenirs. Diaries with the name of Prantik embossed are gifted to the stakeholders as New Year greetings. It spent Rs. 39,500 on promotion in 2014-15, Rs. 19,300 in 2013-14 and Rs. 101,000 in 2012-13.

Although, it was a single product publication, Prantik never starved for funds. At the same time, it could not afford the luxury of having surplus funds. As the printing services are availed outside, it did not have to spend money on purchasing or upgrading the printing machines. The printing service could be availed within Rs. 6 lakh in a year, and the binding and transportation packaging within Rs. 3 lakh. More than Rs.35 lakh was spent on purchase of paper in 2014-15. After printing, establishment cost is a major head. The magazine was able to earn a net profit of Rs. 11.48 lakh in 2014-15 against Rs. 7.6 lakh in the previous year.



## **6. The Management Policies and Processes**

Prantik is one of the few publications that accepts the Wage Board award and pays its staff accordingly. In the absence of a mechanized composing system, there were eight composers who used to do the composing in the initial years. Prantik now can boast of optimum utilization of print space because of in-house computerized composing. The magazine is published from the first floor of the 3000 sq ft residential building of Mr. Baruah. It is an open office- clean, silent, well lit, and well ventilated with no cubicles. Moreover it has a 600 sq.ft storage space on the ground floor. Prantik is quite satisfied with the services of its printers - Saraighat Offset and Saraighat Phototypes. Mr. Dandi Haloi, the binder has never failed in his duty of binding and making the transportation packages in specified cartons as per the requirement of specified nos. of copies agent wise and issue wise.

Dr. Saikia, the founder Chief Editor was an institution in him. When it became evident that Dr. Saikia would not be able to continue with Prantik due to health concerns, a smooth transition process was initiated. The editorial team led by Mr. Baruah assumed the entire responsibility. The old readers still feel the presence of Dr. Saikia in the pages of Prantik. Despite the absence of Dr. Saikia, the basic character of the magazine has not changed. Mr. Baruah attributes this to the composition of the team and team cohesiveness. The broad environment, the demographics and the readership preferences have changed over the years. Prantik has tried to remain contemporary. The dynamism may be observed in editorial policies, selection of contents, mentoring and creation of new writers from the new generation etc. The magazine takes a non-aggressive and cautious mode keeping a safe distance from controversies. At the same time, it keeps the readers alert on the emerging and burning issues in the society. As an editorial policy, Prantik does not provoke and does not succumb too. Yet, it had to face the wrath of one extremist group once.

Prantik is regarded well for its fairness, a rare quality in selecting articles, poems or short stories, paying the least heed to the age or status of the authors. Stress is laid on written words only withstanding the pressures of influential persons seeking favour. This creates embarrassment, but the process is managed.

Getting content has never been a problem with Prantik. They can even convert Prantik to a weekly magazine from this perspective. Acceptance, denial of articles is informed to the readers. They have readily available, addressed and blank printed letters. They send hand written letters in post cards also to maintain a personal touch with some of the esteemed writers. The magazine has not embraced e mode much in relationship management and internal processes. Software helps the circulation manager in managing the yearly subscription and reminding customers about renewal.

Publishers in Assam have recently joined the e marketing business by tying up with the giant Amazon. Considering the growing popularity of e-commerce sites, the young techno savvy generation and the Assamese people elsewhere, major publication houses have made their books available in *www.amazon.com*. Mr. Rupjyoti Konwar, an employee of Banphul Publications, Guwahati, said that within a week of making their books available on Amazon, they sold 60 books worth of Rs. 60,000. It is a good way to promote business. Mr. Baruah of Prantik has not thought anything in this regard. Prantik does not have a website and an official email id. The way the processes are managed now, embracing the e mode at this stage might jeopardise the efficiency of the current functioning – Mr. Baruah feels.

Immediately after receipt of a contribution from a writer, either by post/courier/hand delivery or drop in the letter box at the gate of the office, Prantik records it with a serial no., name, place and mode of despatch. After subject wise sorting, an elimination round is conducted. More than 4,000 letters are received for the feature on 'Patralaap'. In case of poems only, after the in-house elimination, experts' opinions are solicited regarding selection. Once the materials are decided for selection, the authors are informed and entries are made in the issue-wise diary. The judicious mix of relevant content is selected as per the plan of encouraging new writers, having the presence of established writers, and reduction of waiting time. After composition and proof reading, the PDF is despatched to the printer five or six days before the release date. Some established magazines of the state have not been able to manage the time line. Irregular electricity supply, machine breakdown, labour problem, leave of staff etc. are common problems. Prantik has not failed in this regard even with its lean

staff of eight members only. The authors are remunerated within a month. Three days before the release, print copies are sent to the agents with bills. Adherence to a strict action plan has helped in ensuring consistency and regularity of the publication. Except the silver jubilee edition, there has been no special edition on the occasion of festivals like Bihu, Durga Puja etc.

## **7. Image Perception**

Dr. Dilip Kumar Dutta, a mathematician, writer and a non- resident Assamese, once commented in a page of Prantik that the essence created by Prantik could not be destroyed by any storm, volcano or tsunami. For a society to live strongly, a collection of individuals are required which can guard the society from destructive forces. Prantik has created that collection of individuals. So many unpleasant events and issues are present but nobody stands up to them. The message of Prantik is that one needs to fight evil. A reader commented like this.

Prantik has been trying persistently, honestly and responsibly to hold up the mantle of the ideal Assamese society to the discerning Assamese readers all over the world, encompassing all the aspects of Assam in particular, the world in general. The content of the magazine is perceived to contain a heavy dose of science, current affairs, environment etc. Still it allows leisurely reading for popular features like short stories etc. It facilitates postponed reading and pass along readership. Mr. Prasanna Sarma, the Circulation Manager of Prantik stated that the copy of each issue of the magazine that he carries to his village home is read by about 15 people of the locality. A section of the readers have preserved the old issues in bound form. Old issues are exchanged by readers. The magazine has high retention value for them.

Dharani Kalita, living in Azara, Guwahati's outskirts, cannot remember a time when his family did not have a Prantik delivered to their home. The magazine was what his father believed would open the world of knowledge to his children. One reader applauds Prantik for the 'appetizer effect'. "After reading newspapers and watching television news, I turn to Prantik for assimilation. Credibility of the written words of Prantik means a lot"- he stated. "Transitioning from traditional

to modern is not merely embracing westernization; it is about respecting and uplifting one's own culture"- a reader appreciated the role of Prantik in this regard.

In its journey, many of the readers have discontinued. Many new readers have joined. Some of them regret not being able to find time to read the magazine. Some do not find it worthwhile to purchase the magazine as their children do not read Assamese magazines. At the same time, there have been instances when children educated through English medium schools buy and read the magazine.

### **8. The editor/publisher's concern**

In the journey of Prantik, in 1986, the sale of an average issue reached its peak. The figure was almost four times the sale of an average issue in 1982. Since then, there has been a decline till 1999 to a figure which would be about half of the sale of an average issue in 1986. After 1999, the sales increased and currently has stabilised at about 10,000 copies more. The sales could have been much more. Despite all the challenges, the magazine has been able to carve out a niche for itself and has been able to create a Prantik family in the Assamese society. This is quite satisfying. The magazine has managed the transition process remarkably well from the founder Editor to the current editorial team. The composition of the team and the team cohesiveness has been instrumental in this regard. One or two blunders on the part of the editorial staff sometimes cause concern to Mr. Baruah, who is 78 years old now. He delegates many responsibilities to the managerial and editorial staff.

The management processes in the publication house are worth observing. Transparencies in financial management and reporting, adherence to a strict action plan for timely release, well designed distribution system, management of receivables and payment, very low number of unsold copies and accuracy in demand forecasting, retention of employees, maintenance of office atmospherics and work environment, creation of new writers, remarkable number of well sold volume publications of serialised content, dependable outsourcing of key services – are all quite important. With the no- advertising strategy, profitability also has not been a key concern.

Even without changing too much, a product can be continually successful if the vision and mission is clear. Growth in sales is not a priority. Meaningful survival and contribution to society are more important. The challenges in the journey will have to be continually addressed and the day to day management problems will always have to be sorted out. Mr. Baruah feels satisfied in this regard too.

With the advent of the new age media vehicles, the print magazines in India (and Assam as well) are facing problems in retaining readership and increasing circulation. Although Prantik is a unique product in its own category, it cannot defy competition. But Mr. Baruah, the editor publisher of Prantik, is quite undeterred. He derives inspiration and satisfaction from the comments and feedback of the readers. He feels hopeful in the knowledge that some children have also developed the habit of reading Prantik. He considers it a limitation on his part that the magazine has not been able to penetrate in the desired way among the educated people and in the urban areas. He has seen considerable scope to contribute to the cause of protection of Assamese identity, language and Assamese culture. One can be progressive without losing one's identity. He cannot think of anything else, except Prantik, in the foreseeable future.

□□□□

## ***Annexure 1***

### **Features published in Prantik**

The following are the features published in one sample issue of *Prantik* in the sequential order in which it appeared.

1. Cover (highlighting contents inside, with photos and illustration)
2. Inside Cover : photos of folk craft items of the article on folk beliefs of Moran community, published in pp 39-40
3. Content page with indication of contents for the next issue also
4. Conversation on social issues and anything relevant through letters (Patralaap)
5. Editorial (two columns) and Patralaap contd.
6. Pages 6 to 9: Patralaap contd, corrigendum, message from the Editor's room
7. Pages 10 to 12 : Article on equal right for women, half column advt. of two newly released books
8. Pages 13-14 : The power of North Korea
9. Pages 15-18 : Article on crude oil market with graphs and exhibits
10. Pages 19-22 : Article on ATM; Sudoku with answer of the Sudoku in the previous issue
11. Pages 23-26 : Article on gravitational force, science news and quiz with B/W photos
12. Pages 27-28 : Knowledge entertainment, intelligence quiz
13. Pages 29-31 : Discussion (Letters from readers) on the continued uninterrupted journey of Prantik
14. Pages 31-32: Article on TV and our mentality
15. Pages 34-36 : Article on Hindu Muslim unity in Golaghat district
16. Pages 37-38 : Conspiracies in Ahom kingdom
17. Pages 39-40 : Folk crafts of Moran community- article
18. Pages 41-45 : Travelogue
19. Page 46 : Remembrance ( Rudra Baruah – son of the soil)
20. Pages 47-48 : Experience in Tripura, experience in jail
21. Page 49 : Sports ( The South Asian Games)

22. Pages 50-51: Day to day life, poems unlike poems
23. Pages 52-56 : Serialised novel
24. Pages 57-59 : Serialised novel; one column on a Request to Writers by Prantik
25. Pages 60-61 : Poems ( six numbers, two from established poets)
26. Pages 62-65 : Short story and a message from Prantik on how to be a regular customer of Prantik at a discounted rate and send it as a gift item to dear ones
27. The Last Page : Reminiscence of Late Dr. Saikia, founder Chief Editor (excerpts from his diary for five days, Feb 26 to March 2, 1999)
28. Inside back cover : Photos of art work ( three paintings)
29. Back cover : Photos of the travelogue published in pp 41-45



## ***Annexure – 2***

### **A brief description of the major magazines published in the State**

Magazines of interest to general public: These magazines carry features interesting to the general grown up people. These are mostly read by adult members of the family and carry features like articles, serialised novels, stories, poems, jokes etc. These 'family magazines' publish the features in simple, easy to understand style.

Health magazines: There is an emerging trend of increasing readership in health magazines dealing with common ailments, questions and answers etc.

Women's magazines: These magazines carry features interesting and appealing to women.

Specialized magazines: There are several children's magazines, teenagers' magazines in addition to the literary magazines. A few magazines are published by groups or persons with political/ideological inclinations carrying features on political issues.

Table 1 :

**Periodicity wise distribution of INS Member Publications (in nos.)**

State/UT	2011-12						2014-15					
	Daily	Weekly	Fortnightly	Monthly	Others	Total	Daily	Weekly	Fortnightly	Monthly	Others	Total
Andhra Pradesh	48	4	1	5	0	58	49	4	1	5	0	59
Assam	13	5	1	0	1	20	13	4	1	0	0	18
Bihar	7	0	0	0	0	7	7	0	0	0	0	7
Chandigarh	10	0	0	0	0	10	10	0	0	0	0	10
Chhattisgarh	12	0	0	0	0	12	12	0	0	0	0	12
Delhi	57	41	18	61	1	178	52	38	19	54	1	164
Gujarat	34	1	1	0	0	36	34	1	1	0	0	36
Haryana	7	0	1	0	0	8	7	0	1	0	0	8
J&K	13	0	0	0	0	13	13	0	0	0	0	13
Jharkhand	12	0	0	0	0	12	12	0	0	0	0	12
Karnataka	26	5	1	5	0	37	24	5	1	4	0	34
Kerala	20	14	2	6	0	42	20	13	2	6	0	41
Madhya Pradesh	39	4	0	0	0	43	38	3	0	0	0	41
Maharashtra	98	20	9	67	11	205	95	19	9	53	10	186
Meghalaya	2	1	1	1	0	5	2	1	1	1	0	5
Orissa	11	0	0	2	0	13	12	0	0	2	0	14
Punjab	16	0	0	4	0	20	14	0	0	4	0	18
Rajasthan	41	3	1	2	0	47	41	3	1	1	0	46
Tamil Nadu	50	12	9	9	1	81	49	11	9	11	1	81
UP	85	10	0	7	0	102	80	10	0	6	0	96
Uttarakhand	12	5	0	0	0	17	11	5	0	0	0	16

(Source : Hand Books of The Indian Newspaper Society for the two respective years 2011-12 and 2014-15)

**Note :** Maharashtra includes 173 publications from Mumbai. Similarly some of the publications of Delhi and other metros also have national presence



*Table 2 :*

**Language wise break up of circulation of INS Member publications in selected states (2014-15)**

State	No. of publications	Language	Circulation	Total
Assam	12	Assamese	541,698	10,06,773(18)
	01	Bengali	201,386	
	02	English	183,888	
	02	Hindi	58,821	
	01	Khasi	20,980	
Karnataka	06	English	443,474	28,27,526(34)
	24	Kannada	20,50,664	
	04	Others	333,388	
Kerala	03	English	261,711	81,09,487(41)
	38	Malayalam	78,47,776	
Maharashtra	87	English	29,20,792	1,03,51,085(186)
	23	Hindi	23,13,118	
	60	Marathi	50,96,372	
	16	Others	20,803	
Punjab	07	Hindi	959,367	22,14,990(18)
	10	Punjabi	12,45,493	
	01	Others	10,130	
Tamil Nadu	21	English	35,74,232	81,21,904(81)
	60	Tamil	45,47,672	
West Bengal	26	Bengali	36,68,545	48,28,937(47)
	10	English	823,890	
	8	Hindi	270,316	
	3	Urdu	66,186	

*(Source : INS Press Handbook 2014-15, Page Nos 112-113)*

*Table 3 :*

**Language wise break up of circulations of periodicals**

**(INS Member publications in selected states in 2014-15)**

State	No. of publications	Language	Circulation	Total
Assam	04	Assamese	17,832	38,812(5)
	01	Khasi	20,980	
Kerala	02	English	2,61,711	27,92,899(21)
	19	Malayalam	25,31,188	
Karnataka	09	Kannada	245,873	296,366(10)
	01	Urdu	50,493	
Maharashtra	70	English	13,07,702	20,02,478(91)
	07	Marathi	130,583	
	14	Others	564,193	
Punjab	4	Punjabi	328,184	328,184(4)
Tamil Nadu	13	English	17,32,894	18,66,481(32)
	19	Tamil	133,587	

*(Source : INS Press Handbook 2014-15, pp 116-117)*

*Table 4 :*

**Circulation of publications in Assam (2014-15)**

SI No.	Periodicity	Name of the publication	Place of publication	Language	Circulation
1	Daily	Agradoot	Guwahati	Assamese	NA
	Daily	Ajir Asom	Guwahati	Assamese	40,492
	Daily	Amar Asom	Guwahati	Assamese	68,112
	Daily	Asomiya Khabar	Guwahati	Assamese	100,804
	Daily	Asomiya Pratidin	Guwahati	Assamese	1,79,794
	Daily	The Assam Tribune	Guwahati	English	95,745
	Daily	Dainik Asom	Guwahati	Assamese	26,000
	Daily	Dainik Janasadharan	Guwahati	Assamese	58,609
	Daily	Dainik Jugasankha	Guwahati	Bengali	201,386
	Daily	Janambhumi	Jorhat	Assamese	50,055
	Daily	Purvanchal Prahari	Guwahati	Hindi	23,224
	Daily	The Sentinel	Guwahati	English	88,143
2	Weekly	Asam Bani	Guwahat	Assamese	NA
	Weekly	Dongmusa	Guwahat	Khasi	20,980
	Weekly	Janambhumi	Jorhat	Assamese	13,932
	Weekly	Nilachal	Guwahati	Assamese	3,900
3	Fortnightly	Prantik	Guwahati	Assamese	NA

*(Source : INS Press Handbook 2014-15)*

Table 5 :

**Language wise circulation of selected non daily publications in India**

Name of the non daily	State/UT	Language	Periodicity	2011-12	2014-15
Andhra Bhumi	Andhra Pradesh	Telugu	Monthly	39,448	36,842
Annadata	Andhra Pradesh	Telugu	Monthly	200,787	297,766
Agradoot	Assam	Assamese	Bi-weekly	36,493	NA
Prantik	Assam	Assamese	Fortnightly	NA	NA
Shukrawaar	Delhi	Hindi	Weekly	195,000	NA
Champak	Delhi	Hindi	Fortnightly	55,803	55,605
Champak	Delhi	English	Fortnightly	40,015	48,267
Saras Salil	Delhi	Hindi	Fortnightly	591,033	506,924
Sarita	Delhi	Hindi	Fortnightly	59,129	62,532
Women's era	Delhi	English	Fortnightly	85,000	49,839
Cricket Samrat	Delhi	Hindi	Monthly	64,128	38,419
Greh Lakshmi	Delhi	Hindi	Monthly	298,416	NA
Grih Shobha	Delhi	Hindi	Monthly	228,206	231,304
Grihshobhika	Delhi	Marathi	Monthly	69,506	73,915
Feelings	Gujarat	Gujarati	Fortnightly	114,880	114,880
Sudha	Karnataka	Kannada	Weekly	68,679	77,298
Taranga	Karnataka	Kannada	Weekly	74,470	80,763
Sakhi	Karnataka	Kannada	Fortnightly	16,073	9,661
Kasturi	Karnataka	Kannada	Monthly	25,544	24,334

(Contd)

(Contd)

Balabhumi	Kerala	Malayalam	Weekly	95,754	70,114
Balarama	Kerala	Malayalam	Weekly	200,268	204,166
Malayala Manorama	Kerala	Malayalam	Weekly	570,864	423,801
Mathrubhumi Thozhivarthha	Kerala	Malayalam	Weekly	352,792	351,497
Rashtra Deepika Cinema	Kerala	Malayalam	Weekly	74,802	73,857
The Week	Kerala	English	Weekly	206,584	187,970
Vanitha	Kerala	Malayalam	Fortnightly	637,426	676,420
Grihalakshmi	Kerala	Malayalam	Monthly	234,468	193,075
Mathrubhumi Arogya Masika	Kerala	Malayalam	Monthly	214,414	202,355
Krishak Jagat Weekly	Madhya Pradesh	Hindi	Weekly	74,217	74,981
Krushakonnati	Maharashtra	Marathi	Weekly	92,510	95,832
Saptahik Sakal	Maharashtra	Marathi	Weekly	33,767	26,772
Business India	Maharashtra	English	Fortnightly	66,104	NA
Health & Nutrition	Maharashtra	English	Monthly	145,673	145,809
Meri Saheli	Maharashtra	Hindi	Monthly	326,415	301,579
Stardust	Maharashtra	Hindi	Monthly	145,715	145,859
Stardust	Maharashtra	English	Monthly	348,143	348,548
Society	Maharashtra	English	monthly	118,416	118,995
Eastern Panorama	Meghalaya	English	Monthly	61,003	61,731

(Contd)

(Contd)

Kadambini	Odisha	Oriya	Monthly	47,722	49,900
Modern Khedi	Punjab	Punjabi	Monthly	92,995	95,290
Ghar Shingar	Punjab	Punjabi	Monthly	95,897	96,562
Rastrdoot Saptahik	Rajasthan	Hindi	Weekly	506,948	510,258
Balhans	Rajasthan	Hindi	Fortnightly	72,781	51,959
Ananda Vikatan	Tamil Nadu	Tamil	Weekly	263,725	NA
The Hindu Weekly	Tamil Nadu	English	Weekly	14,00,871	13,14,016
Aval Vikatan	Tamil Nadu	Tamil	Fortnightly	241,054	NA
Frontline	Tamil Nadu	English	Fortnightly	70,541	58,996
Naanayam Vikatan	Tamil Nadu	Tamil	Fortnightly	88,853	NA
Mangayar Malar	Tamil Nadu	Tamil	Monthly	161,506	NA
Jagran Sakhi	UP	Hindi	Monthly	149,888	NA
Saptahik Bartamaan	West Bengal	Bengali	Weekly	138,123	154,379
Karmakshetra	West Bengal	Bengali	Weekly	173,972	194,430
Anandalok	West Bengal	Bengali	Fortnightly	54988	62,821
Anandamela	West Bengal	Bengali	Fortnightly	55,406	57,336
Desh	West Bengal	Bengali	Fortnightly	69,074	56,553
Sananda	West Bengal	Bengali	Fortnightly	120,367	104,380

(Source : INS Press Handbook for the respective years)

*Table 6 :*

**Language wise break up of circulation of periodicals**

**(INS Member publications, 2014-15)**

<b>Language</b>	<b>No of publications</b>	<b>Circulation</b>	<b>Percentage of native speakers</b>
Assamese	05	17,832	1.28
Bengali	16	11,28,879	8.11
English	154	39,45,109	NA
Gujarati	12	213,840	4.48
Hindi	64	27,38.889	41.1
Kannada	12	3,03,297	3.69
Malayalam	22	25,36,199	3.21
Marathi	09	2,12,993	6.95
Oriya	03	47,980	3.21
Punjabi	05	378,063	2.83
Tamil	21	138,767	5.91
Telegu	12	418,786	7.19
Others	07	193,044	NA
Total	342	1,22,73,618	

*(Source : i. INS Press Handbook 2014-15 pp 98-104; ii. Census Data, 2001)*

*Table 7 :*

**Periodicity wise break up of publications of INS Members**

<b>Periodicity</b>	<b>2014-15</b>	<b>2011-12</b>
Daily	643	665
Weekly	125	135
Fortnightly	51	50
Monthly	154	176
Others	12	14
Total	985	1040

*(Source : INS Press Hand Book P-121)*