

Images of Women in Print Media — A Research Inquiry

PROF. UMA JOSHI* DR. ANJALI PAHAD**
MS. AVANI MANIAR***

ABSTRACT

Communication is the powerful means of bringing about social changes. The revolutions in the media of communication has helped to accelerated the pace of social change during these decades. Journalisms is one of the dynamic profession of communications. This research-paper focuses on the status of women Journalists and scope of entry of women in journalism. The research study

specifically highlights the opinions of male and female journalists regarding the profession, women's images in print media and status of women's supplements in newspaper and magazines. The sample included journalists from English and Gujarati press of Baroda city. The data wete collected using qualitative and quantitative methods.

Introduction

Communication is the powerful means of bringing about social changes. The revolution in the media of communication has helped to accelerated the pace of social change during these few decades. Radio, television, newspapers and other mass media have not only made this world 'shrunk' but also have revolutionized the values. Attitudes, interests and social milieu.

* Head, Department of Home Science Extension & Communication, Faculty of Home Science, The M.S. University of Baroada, Vadodara.

** Reader, Department of Home Science Extension & Communication, Faculty of Home Science, The M.S. University of Baroada, Vadodara.

*** Lecturer, Department of Home Science Extension & Communication, Faculty of Home Science, The M.S. University of Baroada, Vadodara.

Mass communication has opened many challenges and creative doors which lead to the path of glamorous world. Journalism is one of the important stars of creativity in the universe of mass communication.

Journalism means the communications or information regarding the events of the day through written words, sounds or pictures. Journalism is a mirror of the society. The journalist acts as a spokesman of mankind. He must therefore, provide a truthful, comprehensive and intelligent account of the events in a context that gives meaning. The journalist should act as an effective medium for two way communication between readers and different organizations of the society. A journalist observes the events, transmits facts about the events and act as an interpreter of these events. He/She also explains the significances of the facts and offers opinions on contemporary issues.

In modern times, journalism has become an exciting and interesting profession in the field of communication. There is no doubt that it is a noble profession aiming at the service of the people by the denomination of news. It is a very dynamic profession, which moves with times. Very often it becomes the initiating factor for many new development and achievement.

Women as journalists - the challenging profession

The general assumption according to societal trend seems to be that it is difficult for women to reach unto managerial position due to their so-called inherent inability and the traditional upbringing at home.

There is no reason why women cannot choose journalism as career. Just as there is no reason why women cannot choose any discipline or area as career. Women are not handicapped by birth nor have they been found intellectually unfit. They are however, burdened with certain disadvantages as a result of the responsibilities. These get further accentuated when confronted by male prejudice in professions that have been traditionally male dominated, like journalism. Just as there is no reason why women cannot choose any discipline or area as career.

One of the journalists named 'Charlie Hands' reported that revolution is bound to come when more women than ever in newspaper work, reporting, sub-editing, news editing and even do editing. Further, he added that all the advantages are with women. Firstly, do not drink. Secondly, they are more in touch with the realities of life, women are better judges, they have more taste, and they are more human... their outlook is really wider than that of men. Women journalists have proved a every bit as resourceful and enterprising in their work as their male colleagues, and

they have gone places winning laurels on the way by way of awards, fellowships abroad and prestigious assignments.

Future Scope for Women in journalism profession

Women are crucial part in this profession. There was a belief that male members would overpower this profession. But, with the passage of time, the thoughts of the people have changed and this profession gave space for women journalists. L. K. Advani, the Deputy Prime Minister, state in National Conference on Women and Media (2000), that women are coming into media and journalism in larger numbers. There is immense potential for the combination of media and voluntary sector as a force for bringing about the empowerment of women. He added that this would bring women's power and media power together as a formidable weapon.

Thus, knowing women's role in media, specifically in journalism, it provided that the future is bright for women in this field. But, time and again women have to prove their worth in every sphere of life, so, in this profession. She has to constantly excel in every field of journalism. There are many qualities that women ingrain in them from birth, and many she accepts from the environment. Hence, given the chance and congenial environment, women have flourishing future in this field.

Rational of the study

The present study will focus on the scope of entry of women in journalism, which would prepare the present female youth for this novel and challenging profession. The study will also focus on understanding the sociology and professional status of women journalist and may provide guide lines to the employers to workout the structure, which provides conducive atmosphere to the women journalists to carry out their responsibilities.

Objectives of the study

1. To study the opinions of male and female journalists regarding:
 - Journalism as a profession
 - Women's supplements in newspaper and women's magazines.
 - Women's images in print media.

METHODOLOGY

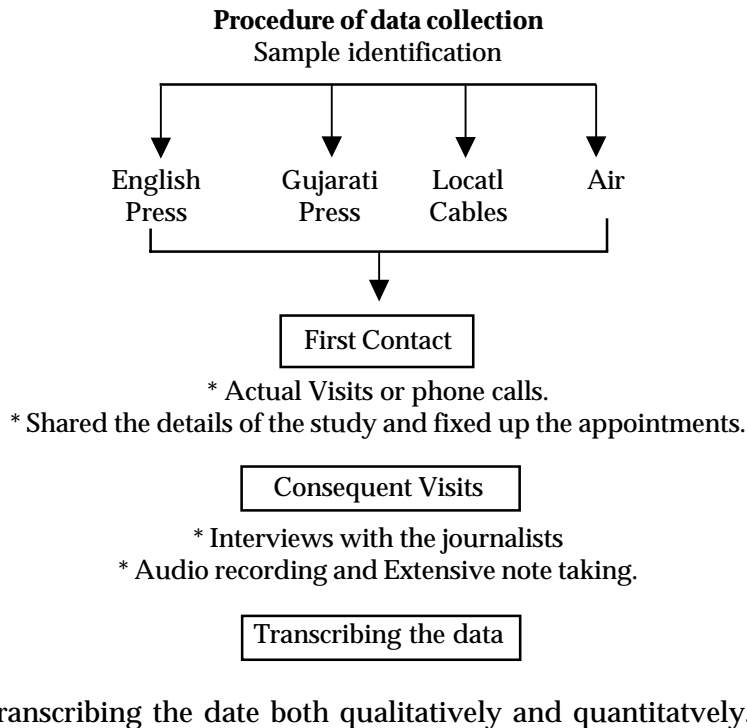
Population and Sample of the Study

The population of the study comprised of journalists from English and Gujarati press, local cable and broadcast network in Baroda.

A formal list of journalists was taken from the office of the Deputy director, Information Bureau. An informed survey was conducted to identify the journalists from the English and Gujarati press, local cable network and from All India Radio Station in the city of Baroda in the year 2003. Thus twenty journalists were identified and they comprised the sample for the study.

Data Collection

Data was collected through an interview schedule. Journalists were contacted on phone to take prior appointment for interview. Thereafter they were contacted personally to conduct an in-depth interview.



Total time Required

For interviewing each journalists -30-40 minutes per journalists, For transcribing the audio recording notes-3-4 hours per journalists.

Results and Discussion

Following were the findings of the study.

1. Regarding the **scope of women in journalism**, journalist unanimously felt that women have tremendous scope in this field.

This may be due to the fact that in this brave new world, large number of women are entering the field of journalism. A number of older hands are nearing the top of the editorial ladder and a handful have achieved what would have been unthinkable just a couple of decades ago. Such periodic changes and other developing trends in the press will continue to influence the experience of and prospects for women in journalism. Therefore, it was reported that-

- “Women can join as reporters and can become chief editors”
- “The opportunities for women are there in journalism, but they have to grab the opportunities.”

Journalists under the study, strongly felt that English Press does not discriminate between journalists on the basis of gender and there is no gender based division of labour, which is a very progressive trend. Contrary to this, male journalists from vernacular press reported that population of female journalists is very this in these press due to uncondusive work environment for females and the images of women in these press organizations are stereotypical.

This is a very serious problem faced by the women of developing countries, irrespective of the extent of development, face discrimination of the ground of sex in varying degrees in the matter of employment opportunities, working conditions and career growth. This shows that there are barriers and limitations for women in the vernacular press.

Women journalists who entered this profession in 60's and 70's had to work and fight hard to escape from the professional ghettos into which stray women in the media were then customarily herded. A number of them managed to get into the coveted reporting stream, slowly making their way from flower shows to fires and eventually, event battle fronts of various kinds. They also forced newspaper establishments to contend with issues like maternity leave. Now, at the turn of the century and millennium, women journalists seems to be everywhere streaming in and out of newspaper and magazine offices, bustling around in news rooms, and milling about wherever news of various sorts is being made. This trend shows women journalists do not have to undergo the same struggle as their counterparts in earlier years of entry.

Work environment, thinking of the people, awareness about various jobs has increased tremendously since the last two decades, which makes this profession worth for women to work. There is no doubt now, that women are in this profession to stay, and what is more, to make their mark.

2. On inquiry about whether men were more suitable for jobs in print media than female, mixed feelings and reactions were expressed. The reactions ranged from traditional to modern, to feminist thinking about women's suitability for journalism.

Some of the male as well as female journalists expressed that-

- "Men are generally more suitable because women find it difficult to keep up with that long hours, odd hours and visit cretin places".
- "Family do not allow women to go out at odd hours, during crisis.
- "This is true during crisis. Women themselves do not like to go to various sensitive areas. Editors and senior reporters are responsible for them and therefore they do not allow women to cover controversial and sensitive issues".
- Thinking of journalist have changed towards women, but society has not changed.
- At times yes, especially at the time of riots, it is easier for males to move around.

From such reactions, one can conclude that men journalists are still considered superior and suitable. It confirms that women journalists were burdened with certain disadvantages are result of the responsibilities assigned to them and the social restrictions placed on them. One of the most damaging jobs. The bosses invariably male, in their bias tend to give "softer" assignments to women that is the mofussil page if a subeditor, since it does not require a night shift. If given night duty, then her "safety" is the responsibility of males who have recruited her. They are made to realize that being women they cannot or should not handle crisis or emergencies.

On the other hand, there were men and women journalists, with modern views-

- "Gender does not make difference. Sometimes men are also not able to handle the situations like riots".
- "No today it is not so. Women journalists are equally creative, talented and hard working".

Such reactions show that there is no reason for unsuitability of women in journalism. It confirms that journalists have realized the competencies existing in female journalists. Gender does not confirm the suitability of person in the profession of journalism, but there are various other factors, which can be considered - like sincerity, dedication, confidence and personality of a person.

There was one female journalist who revealed that, "The hazards of hard professional work are all man made, man borne, and man created. It is just the commitment and determination in individual which matters'.

In fact, one of the male journalists was also having the same views. "It is the male only who do not give her opportunity. In fact, women like to take challenges".

There are very few respondents who had modern and feminist thoughts. It is surprising to know that journalists themselves are biased and are still blaming the society and societal roles which they have to follow. Such diverse views shows that a proper way thinking has to be generated amongst the literate masses towards women. Gender biases needs to be dissolved and a socialization pattern has to be favouring girls growth and development. Only then, we will find our country a developed country, with equal rights to all human beings irrespective of gender.

2. Majority of the respondents irrespective of their sex, agreed that young women in print media are committed to their job.

Respondents reported that women are serious, clear with their goals, determined, dedicated, interested and more ethical in their profession. However, a couple of male journalists had unfavourable responses. They expressed that they might otherwise agree that women are more sincere workers, but with marriage and children, women are not able to do justice to journalism profession because of long job hours and irregular time schedules. Hence males in this profession are better options, women would not be able to do justice to this job.

According to Kapoor, A. (1996) in practice, though there are very few mothers working as full time correspondents in this field of journalism, many have not only done double duty, but also carved a niche for themselves in this profession. This includes name like Mrinal Pande, Coomi Kapoor, Usha Rai, Pamela Philipose and Rasheeda

Bhagat, women who were among the first to braid the male bastion and work their way up, despite these prejudices.

4. When asked about **the difference between men and women regarding their perception of news**, majority of the male journalists expressed that women are more sensitive and emotional especially when it comes to women's issues. However, one journalist expressed absolutely different response. According to him, "In print media journalists are not looked as male and female. They are in the profession and unbiased. The emotions and sentiments are put aside and they talk on the issue". Female respondents unanimously reported that the gender does not come in the way of their profession. The treatment to the news differs, but only on the basis of individuals and not gender wise. "Women think more critically", "do not take decisions in haste", are some of the other added responses of women journalists. Thus, the expression about women journalists regarding their approach to deal with the news and views, seemed to be free of gender bias. Males as well as females more or less held the same view in this regard.

Jha Rama (1992), also expressed that "women in the print media as professionals will have the same news sense as a male colleague would have with a bit of an extra. They would see the human angle in the story a little more quickly and would avoid doing a dry analysis".

5. "**Women's issues do not find a place in print media**", when told to the female respondents, almost ninety percent of them expressed that it was true earlier. Over the years, it has improved. Today media is vigilant and women's issues are given weightage by giving adequate coverage.

A couple of journalists expressed that women's issues are covered in print media, but they are mainly on atrocities on women and not on women's achievement in different areas.

Researches stressed that "Women issues" are written about, but one of the things that has gone wrong is that these are written with such stringency and militancy that the reader does not read them. And as a result of this, the newspaper carry fewer and fewer articles on women. She suggested that. "They have to be written in much more human, much less militant way".

However, some studies refused to categorize women's issues as male and female concerns and responded, "Frankly I think if these issues

are to be taken up, it is not for women journalists only, why shouldn't male journalists write about these? These issues are important to society as whole and, I am against the stereototype of women writing on women's issues.

Thus, it is implied that coverage of women's issues, in print media is not adequate and not without its set of cultural biases. And even after the strides that women journalists in India have made, much remains to be achieved. These cultural biases in media in general will take time to completely vanish. Meanwhile certain suggestions can be made which can go a long way in eliminating gender biases and help bring in a certain buoyancy where women will have their due place without having to offer any justification to occupy.

6. A very interesting finding emerged when the question regarding **imbalance of the projection of women's atrocities' and women's achievements, in print** was asked to the respondent. High majority of the males expressed that we do cover the women's achievement along with news on women's atrocities. But "we have to write according to the demands of the society, moreover we have to sell the newspaper so some sensational news is must". One of the male respondents conveyed that our society is not so bold to boast loudly about women's achievements.

In addition to the same, Anklesaria (1996), also expressed, that newspaper project stories of atrocities on women like rape, etc. and never bother to project women achievers. The reasons she recounts are that. "There are so very few women actually committed to women's issues. And then so little is written about them. And if as a journalist, you cover only women's issues, it sometimes turns against you. You are slotted and never given any other beat".

Thus to conclude, on the part of journalists, "Self-Restraint" is a must, particularly on women's issues. Other wise there is a danger of sensationalizing reports on atrocities on women. Atrocities are atrocious enough. What is needed is a cool, objective, factual hard look at these, so that the subversion of women's interests that goes in the male dominated press does not occur.

7. When asked whether **women's supplements in newspapers and magazines were women development oriented**. (Unanimously the answer was no. Irrespective of the gender, respondents agreed that magazines do have scope for women's development, but unfortunately women are more or less interested with stereotypical

areas, interested and want to stick to cooking, interior decoration and family care etc. The journalists expressed that average female reader would like to read about these stereotypical areas and very few would like to thrive for the articles which reflect the growth and development of women in the areas like education, career, etc. Thus, journalists have to cater to the demands of the majority of the readers.

8. Respondents were asked the **possible ways of improving the image of women in print media**. Majority of the male respondents expressed that this task can be fulfilled only when women themselves try hard for it. Women should change the stereotypical images in all spheres and thus the change will be reflected in media. Whereas the female journalists opined that women should build positive image in the society by becoming more aware about the surrounding, by raising voices against all odds, by encouraging other women for upliftment, by demanding women's development in all spheres and by becoming more inspired and motivate.

Conclusion

The society has to create parallel opportunities to chase career in any profession for men and women. The traditional outlook of society for women needs to be change. Society should accept the young women in journalism profession. Social barriers can be broken if the families accept their supportive role in the changing life style of women. Family can create an environment of equal expectations and status of both its female and male members.

The family members and teachers and educational institutions must help to develop certain characteristics in men and women, like self-esteem, analytical skills, risk raking an inquisitiveness so that men and women can handle the task involved in journalism profession more skillfully.

Today journalism as a profession is well developing in India. This means that there is constant demand for trained and able men and women to work effectively with work culture in this profession. A journalist can succeed if he or she is well trained to cope up with the deadlines on this profession. Training should be ingrained in journalists to reach the top lever of this profession. Training can enable the future youngsters to develop different journalistic skills, which help to work smoothly and meet with various hardships evolved in this profession. Thus, the training in the various related areas of this field should be a major component of journalism.

Journalism profession is dynamic in its nature of work. The work schedule under critical circumstances, the irregular job hours, fewer holidays all are the part and parcel of this profession.

On the other hand, the glamorous world, the social status, expression of own ideas and views are the influencing factors which attract the minds of the people to pursue their career in this profession.

Youngsters who working in this profession should be able to adjust themselves under all the circumstances so that they feel no or less constraints. Hence, they can play their roles effectively and efficiently.

Indian women as portrayed in the print media is not adequate and not without its set of cultural biases. And even after the strides that women journalists in India, have made, much remains to be achieved. It is reassuring that it is not a depressing scenario any more. The cultural biases in media in general will take time to completely vanish.

Meanwhile certain suggestions might here be made, which can go a 'long' way in eliminating gender biases.

1. Women in media are to make sure that woman, as subjects of analysis are not presented as the subordinate sex. It need not continue to be defended on grounds that media simply reflects reality of women's legal, political, economic and social powerlessness. The images of women emerging from the print media would reflect distribution of power and mechanisms of control in a vivid way. When the framework of media expands to admit women in their development stories, it would reflect this expansion. This way the ideological control on women's self perceptions will gradually vanish and women will speak in their own voice.
2. Media has to perform a special role of opinion creation and may be an in-house cultivation of 'alternate culture'. It is clear that the stereotypes which exist in the media's portrayal of women do not generally originate with media. They arise from beliefs widespread in society as whole. Therefore, media must create transformation of women's images by presenting more positive aspects of these with an express view of modifying them.
3. There should be occasional workshops organized to bring together women media personnel in touch with women activists and other professionals.
4. National communication policy should provide rough media norms. Self-restrained is a must, particularly on women's issues.

5. The child-bearing responsibility of women should be the concern of everybody, and all facilities, concessions, etc. in allowing her to fulfill the related responsibilities should be a matter of right and a reason for discrimination.

From a situation when the media was considered to be no place for a woman, times have changed to more and more women joining the fourth estate. However, just as women in the larger society have broken many traditional barriers on politics, economics, and social areas while their male counterparts have undergone less of an attitudinal change, women journalists too have to cope with similar biases within the profession. In the coming years the number of women covering 'hard' beats will undoubtedly grow, just as more men will become interested in writing on "softer" issues, but whether this will also be accompanied with a change in perceptions is the moot point.

References

- AGGARWAL, Hema. *Society, Culture Mass Communication, Sociology of Journalism*. Jaipur and New Delhi. Press Rawat Publication, 1995.
- AKHILHSHVARI, R. Should Women Opt for Journalism. *Vidura*, 27(1), February 1990, pp 18-19.
- BHATNAGAR, Vinod. *Development Dynamics of Press and Journalism*. Jaipur. Printwell Publication, 1996.
- CHAKRABORTY, Prithvis. Outstanding Women Journalists. *Vidura*, 33(2), April 1996. pp. 11-13.
- CHANDRA and SAXENA, T. P. *Style manual for writing thesis, dissertation and papers in Social Sciences*. New Delhi, Metropolitan Book Co., 1974.
- GANESH. S. *Lectures on Mass Communication*. Delhi, Indian Publishers Distributors. 1995.
- GARRET, H. E. *Statistics in Psychology and Education*, New York, David Me. Kay Company, 1989.
- HENRY, Susan. *Changing media history through women history*. New Delhi, Sage Publications, 1989, pp 34-57.
- JAYASWAL, Sudhanshu. Journalism Education in India : An Assessment. *University News*, 35(37), September 15, 1997, pp 8-12.
- JHA. Rama. *Women and the Indian Print media : Portrayal and Performance*. Delhi. Chanakya Publication, 1992.
- JOSEPH, M. K. *Textbook of Editing and Reporting*, New Delhi, Dominant Publications and Distributors, 2000.

- JOSEPH, Ammu. *Women in Journalism : Making News*. Delhi. Komirk Publications, 2000.
- JOSHI, Uma. *Textbook of Mass Communications and Media*. New Delhi, Anmol Publications Pvt. Ltd., 1999.
- KAPOOR, Aditi. Changeless attitudes, in a changing society, *Humanspace*, 3(14), December 1996, pp 9-11.
- KUMAR, K. J. *Mass Communication in India*. Jaico Publications House, 1989.
- “LAFKY, Sue. *Economic equality and the journalist’s work place*. New Delhi, Sage Publications, 1989.
- NATIONAL Conference on Women and Media. A report, *Social Welfare* 49(1), April 2002.
- PHILIPOSE, Pamela. *Breaking the Mould*, *Vidura* 35(3), July-September, 1993, pp. 11-12.
- PANT. N. C. and KUMAR, J. *Dimensions of modern journalism*. New Delhi, Kanishka Publications, 1995.
- RATNAMALA. *Women journalists, in daily reporting*. *Vidura*, 27(1), January-February, 1989, pp. 22-23.
- SHAH, Preria. *The Gender Factor in journalism : A Study of Women journalistsjn Selected Cities of Gujarat*.
Thesis (M. Sc.) M. S. University, Baroda, 2002.
- VAN1, C. *Women journalists at work ; an uphill task*, *Vidura* 27(1), Januray- February, 1989,pp.21-22.

□□□