

CHAPTER-5

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5.1: Findings of the Study

Some of the important findings of the study are as follows:

1. In terms of space, the Times of India provided more coverage on women's issues than those of Roznama Rashtriya Sahara and Dainik Jagran. However, in terms of frequency, the Urdu newspaper (Roznama Rashtriya Sahara) carried more number of stories than that of the English (The Times of India) and Hindi newspapers (Dainik Jagran).
2. The Times of India published adequate number of cartoons relevant to women's issues. Both the vernacular newspapers did not publish a single cartoon on women during the period.
3. Though The Times of India published lesser number of stories than Roznama Rashtriya Sahara in total in terms of frequency as well as space, it has given more importance to opinion pieces. This shows that the newspaper is giving considerable importance to women's issues in its agenda.
4. Dainik Jagran seems to be not giving adequate importance to women's issues in its news agenda. This fact can be inferred from its overall coverage on women's issues in general and in its coverage on opinion pieces in particular.
5. The Times of India carried more number of stories on its front pages than those of the vernacular newspapers under study.
6. Invariably all the newspapers under study gave more importance to rape and sexual harassment in their coverage. However, rape got more prominence in the Times of India than those of the vernacular newspapers under study. Both the newspapers gave more importance to sexual harassment cases than that of the Times of India.
7. Dowry death cases got more coverage in the vernacular press under study than that the Times of India.
8. In case of murder also, vernacular newspapers gave more prominence in its coverage.

9. Surprisingly, not a single story related to divorce was published in Urdu newspaper (Roznama Rashtriya Sahara). However, among two other dailies under study, the Times of India covered 26 stories whereas Dainik Jagran published only four stories during the study period.
10. On domestic violence, Roznama Rashtriya Sahara covered 45 stories whereas the Times of India and Dainik Jagran covered 10 stories each.
11. Stories related to kidnapping acquired more prominent coverage in Roznama Rashtriya Sahara than those of Dainik Jagran and the Times of India.
12. Miscellaneous is the category of women's issues those do not fall under any of the above categories occupied maximum news coverage in all the newspapers under study.
13. Most of the news stories related to women were generally covered by male journalists. Among the three newspapers under study, the Times of India published 103 stories with female bylines whereas Dainik Jagran and Roznama Rashtriya Sahara published nine and three stories respectively.
14. All the three newspapers gave maximum space to sensational stories related to women.
15. While representing women's issues, the journalists adopted sensational frame.

5.2: Conclusion

It is generally assumed that the press could not be taking much cognizance of women's developmental needs, and this broad assumption was found to be true. But as far as day-to-day coverage is concerned, it was also found not to brand the entire media with the brush of being gender-insensitive. It was revealed through the study that the regional media does make its efforts to highlight women, either when they are victims of violence or when they are achievers. Surely, regional newspapers which are generally published as local editions like DJ, RRS are better than Delhi's TOI, which is generally criticized by the critiques for sensationalising the news in the name of glamour in its own daily supplements.

Poverty, illiteracy, discrimination, and male domination still keep a vast majority of women away from the print media, even as readers. As a result women's views on general, economic, political, and social matters are either ignored or not taken seriously. As one moves out from metropolitan towns and the state capital, the

neglect of women's issues increases. At the district and taluka level, where from the bulk of the newspapers are published and which are more newsworthy places for local and regional consumption, there is more conservatism, more rigid social mores and greater resistance to social change.

Newspaper publishers know the importance of retaining the confidence of the less privileged sections. They must be seen to be sensitive to the problems of the urban and rural working classes and all those who go by the name of the exploited. Large regiments of correspondents and reporters are engaged to cover the doings of the various strands of common people that make up the community. They place considerable emphasis on what are called human interest stories.

Indeed, the task of newspaper editors is really to make the whole newspaper more meaningful to more women. It is clear to us that there is an unwritten hierarchy of news. If women's concerns fitted into the hierarchy, then they receive attention. Otherwise they are relegated to the features sections. All news coverage has a women's angle to it and this has to be integrated into news reporting. While reporting about women's issues, what we need is gendered lens. A gendered lens allows us to gain deeper insight into all issues that are to be covered which impact men and women differently. Hence, understanding what determines the difference can help us to see dimensions of a story that would otherwise be overlooked.

Generally media houses are dominated by the patriarchal hierarchy. It happens because journalists do not understand how patriarchal systems work, how they determine what women can and cannot do, and how patriarchy reduces the value of women's work to such an extent that it appears to have no value at all. This deliberate downgrading of women's work results in it not being acknowledged as significant, or important, and therefore ignored by the media. It is precisely because we want to take away this curtain of invisibility that we believe journalists need to understand what is meant by terms like "gender" or "patriarchy".

The one issue in which women are central and that always receives a great deal of attention is that of sexual assault. But the attention of the media is selective. When the victim or victims are of a certain class, there are campaigns, articles, analyses of the law and continuous follow up. When the victims are tribal or poor women, there is a mention but the issue is forgotten.

However, the inordinate attention that women of the middle and upper classes get when they are the victims is not always in their favour. Yet, in its coverage of some of these events, the media tends to victimise the victim through the use of language, through innuendo, through giving equal space, or sometimes more, to her detractors while knowing that she is not a position to speak out.

Gender bias, a class bias dominates the choice of stories that the media chooses to feature. Yet by chasing individual stories, the media overlooks the larger issue of violence by not indicating the extent to which women live under the sword of constant sexual violence, within and outside their homes.

So what norms should govern the coverage of sexual violence in the media so that victims are not persecuted. Gender sensitivity would ensure that journalists understand the basis of much of the violence — that it is not lust as is often made out but power. It is the power that men know they can assert on women by using violence that is at the core of such actions. And ultimately it is women's powerlessness in a society that doubts the survivor of violence that makes it virtually impossible for them to seek justice.

Women's issues have gained additional legitimacy in recent times because they have been adopted and acted upon in various ways by at least some political parties, the government, the non-governmental sector, other policy-making or programme implementing bodies, as well as international organizations. Despite many such positive developments, there is little doubt that the evident increase in the quantum of coverage has been accompanied by an upsurge in trivialization, and that there has been little change in the media's preoccupation with events and neglect of processes.

Press coverage of women's issues in the course of six years during the period between 2005 and 2010 was predominantly event-oriented, with a major focus of stories related to violence and crime. Even within the category, certain themes such as Rape, sexual harassment, domestic violence and rape were more prevalent than others like Matrimonial Dispute, Acid Attack, female infanticide and foeticide. The other category of stories that made it to the papers obviously had news value because they dealt mainly with the activities of the 'knowns.' Many issues which were taken in the category as 'miscellaneous' were about denial of many rights on the basis of for example personal laws, the impact of economic, development and population policies

on women, women's work and wages, the absence of support structures and services, the impact of fundamentalism and communalism on women, women's participation in politics.

The study tracing reportage on women's issues by English, Hindi and Urdu newspapers over six year period also found that women related issues were found more in terms of stories in Urdu newspaper while in terms of area covered, English newspaper gave more coverage. Hindi newspaper lagged behind both English and Hindi newspapers in terms of number of stories as well as area covered.

Women and gender concerns need to be integrated into the broad news agenda. Women's issues' were still, by and large, seen as narrow, niche issues and covered as such; some—especially dramatic or lurid cases of violence or discrimination—continue to receive more coverage than other equally important issues. Superficiality, sensationalism and/or insensitivity frequently marked such coverage. Serious coverage of significant gender-related events /issues, when it occurs, is often lost in the carpet coverage accorded to trivial pursuits.

Blatant sexism and crude stereotyping were less evident but subtle forms—possibly more pernicious and effective—persisted. Special pages for coverage of gender (and/or development) had disappeared, although a few columns written from a feminist/gender perspective continue. Women were viewed, presented and addressed more as consumers than as citizens. The focus was primarily on individual women rather than on women as collective and / or as female members of diverse communities with some shared experiences and concerns, needs and opinions.

'Ordinary' women, and their experiences and opinions, were either missing or represented almost exclusively by urban, middle-class women. Socially, economically, geographically and otherwise disadvantaged women, and their experiences and opinions, were virtually absent.

While the press in India does not entirely ignore women's events or processes concerning the less powerful, including women, such coverage tends, by and large, to be fairly superficial. Women's groups in India have been able to project at least parts of their struggle fairly effectively through the press.

Nevertheless, the gender perspective has not yet been properly integrated into the process of newsgathering. Thus even when an incident touches the lives of women, their views are rarely sought; even when an issue concerns them directly,

their voices are barely heard. For the decision-makers in the newsgathering establishment, they are still not important constituents except in very specific contexts: as consumers who form an important target audience for the advertisements on which the media's viability depends or as victims of atrocities. In that sense, women continue to be 'the other' as far as the press is concerned.

The historical legacy of the press in India, a generally liberal and reform-minded approach, has benefited the coverage of women's issues in the print media. The rise of the contemporary Indian women's movement, and the consequent increase in public consciousness about women's oppression and quest for emancipation, has led to the espousal of women's concerns by the main political parties in the country. While their commitment is clearly superficial, it has given women's issues a political legitimacy, thereby enabling them to fit into the mainstream notions of what constitutes news.

Although the press has played a significant role in publicizing issues which readily conform to the traditional definitions of newsworthiness, other equally important women's issues that are less 'newsy' continue to be marginalized. In other words, what we would call the 'feminization' of the news process has not yet taken place. This would involve paying as much attention to the process as to the event and making a deliberate attempt to seek the views of the inarticulate majority instead of routinely reporting on the prominent and the powerful.

There was little discussion on the limitations of the law or the additional supports outside the State structure that would be essential to ensure the efficacy of legislation dealing with social crimes. The unwritten, but generally accepted, social compact that governs many of the positions taken by the mainstream media on such issues is an acceptance of the State as the arbiter in dealing with crimes against the so-called weaker sections.

There were a small number of editorials focused on the gender question, examining the relationship between violence and women's oppression. It is worth noting that the editorial page articles analyzed women's issues from the women's perspective. The opinion piece pages of the most of the papers seemed to have been more responsive to the issue than the news sections.

In the press, for example, there have been noticeable changes in the presentation of news and views, dictated partly by the growth of the electronic media

and partly by the increasingly consumer-oriented nature of the Indian economy. However, one characteristic of the press that has not significantly altered in the intervening years is its continuing event-orientation. Nor has the press deviated much from its traditional definitions of news and its customary hierarchy of news values.

A second noteworthy development has been the remarkable increase in the number of media women who have been able to make a mark in the 'hard' news areas of politics and economics which until recently were all-male bastions.

All these factors have had an impact on press coverage of women's issues over the past few years. For instance, women's issues are usually given significant coverage when they fit the dominant norms of what constitutes news. Since the media continue to emphasise events rather than processes, the shift in the women's issues, from high decibel, single issue, public campaigns centred around atrocities against women to more consistent but low-key work that acknowledges the complex nature of women's oppression, has meant some diminution in the media's coverage of women's issues.

This new world view of the media directly affects those in the profession who remain convinced that the concerns of the silent and deprived sections of society must be reflected in media coverage. They are given little encouragement today. Those who undertake such assignments on their own initiative are rarely given the space to present all their findings in full. And, certainly, they are unlikely to reach the higher echelons of the editorial hierarchy.

In the final analysis, none of these reasons for paying attention to gender inequality is as important as the immeasurable moral cost of being an unethical society, lacking commitment to basic justice, dignity and equality. As long as discrimination on the basis of gender is accepted and tolerated, every other form of discrimination is upheld and justified, at least by default.