

## Women Journalists: The Challenges and Limitations

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### ABSTRACT

Mass Media is linked to the word communication, which refers to an exchange of information and messages. As a platform for the mass, media today continues to be the ruler of our existence in the field of communication. With the advent of globalization, the Media industry has become a powerful tool to influence masses of people. With the growth of the media as an industry there have been an increasing number of job opportunities. The scope of journalism for women has also increased manifold. Women today are crucial part of journalism. Today more and more women are choosing journalism as a career option. Journalism is a challenging profession, which may be exciting but also hazardous. In comparison to men, women journalists find the profession more challenging as they deal with many hurdles within their respective organizations. The paper attempts to study the challenges faced by women journalists and their limitations in the present world.

**KEY WORD:** Media, female journalists, challenges

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### I. INTRODUCTION

Journalism, is considered as an inseparable part of any democratic set up is an institution in its own right. Although there are many women who are involved in careers in the communication sector, there is a dearth of hardcore women journalists which is why the sector is generally regarded as a 'men's sphere'. Media as a challenging profession involves all media workers to face risks and difficulties. However, lives of women are more challenging than men in the world of journalism. Unequal work status, gender based discrimination in duty allotment, poor working conditions, exposure to abuse are some of the challenges faced by women journalists in workplace as well as in field. Women journalists often have to negotiate with various personal, professional and sociostructural challenges, which are often less, talked about. Hence, it is necessary to identify the enabling factors that affect women in discharging their duties as journalists. Despite these, women journalists are excelling and more number of them entering the profession in recent years.

India being one of the most diversified societies in the world, due to its wide variety languages, communities, religion, culture, lifestyles etc., has inherited this legacy of cultural diversity from Vedic, Islamic, Buddhist, Christianity and other religious and cultural traditions. However there is a paradoxical challenge with regard to traditional perception of women in the Indian society. On the one hand tradition deifies women, on the other hand the same tradition also treats her like a second class citizen and reduce her to a mere home maker's role, subservient to male chauvinistic patriarchal norms. In Indian patriarchal society men have complete stranglehold on their families leading to curtailment of the rights of women. Women's associations have ceaselessly fought against such practices. However, the very questioning of patriarchal norms are deemed as offense to the so called traditional 'Sanskriti' (Culture).

Kasulis (2017) stated that history is a witness to deep rooted patriarchal system crippling women's struggle for equal rights. Even the dawn twenty first century hasn't been able to halt various kinds of gender biases faced by women. Apart from many kinds of discrimination, women are also struggling to get an equal footing in professional status also. It is a foregone conclusion that women are excelling and in some cases outshining men in various spheres of economy. The field of mass media and journalism is no exception to this. Women are successfully working as journalists, reporters, editors, writers, producers, directors and so on in both news and entertainment industry. The professional skills and abilities of women journalists are equal to their men counterparts. Journalism is a field where more women are plunging into as professionals at various levels in the industry. Women journalists are professionally engaged in both print and electronic media. Women journalists just like any other working women have the strenuous job of managing work and home. The unusual work cycle of journalism profession makes their task more difficult, as all journalists irrespective of gender are expected to work in various shifts including night shift. This may lead to disturbances in the family, health disorders, mental and physical pressures, loss of mental peace, fluctuation in terms of job satisfaction and

motivational levels. Journalism as a profession is not everyone's cup of tea. It is rather challenging to work in the news media industry given the breakneck speed news are updated. Hence, those who chose to be journalists need to be the best in their respective specialized fields but also expected to meet the deadlines with decisiveness with limited errors. The challenges of women journalists are twice that of men, as they are expected to fulfill their household chores also along with professional commitments. As stated earlier, a substantial number of women journalists are working in both print and electronic media. There is a strong view that news organizations, working journalists associations, and the government agencies are not paying serious attention in addressing the problems of working women journalists.

## II. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

'Is there any sexual reason why a woman should be a less accomplished journalist than a man? I can find none.' This was the question posed in 1898 by that stalwart feminist writer Arnold Bennett in his publication *Journalism for Women: A Practical Guide*. He had observed the considerable hurdles facing women who wanted to succeed as journalists, as in almost every other workplace at that time. 'A few determined, pioneers . . . found their way into newsrooms but they faced multiple obstacles, notably a lack of educational opportunities, the prevailing view that the woman's place was in the home, and fierce resistance from a largely male workforce' (Lonsdale, 2013). There was a small band of female journalists in the early days of mass media who managed to negotiate a way through, like the remarkable Nellie Bly in the US (Fahs, 2011) or women such as Frances Power Cobbe or Alice Meynell writing in the English press at the turn of the twentieth century (Grey, 2012), the Prussian-born Hulda Friedrichsmand the pioneering Swedish journalists Wendela Hebbe and Ester Blendam Nordström. Nevertheless, the participation of women in the journalistic workforce – and certainly in areas beyond strictly feminine topics – was a painfully slow process. The route of women's entry into the modern workplace altogether has not been a steady and gradual path towards emancipation. There are surprising advances and early examples of success, which were subsequently reversed. The history of women's employment during both world wars demonstrates plenty of cases where what was previously seen as unthinkable suddenly became commonplace – and then once the landscape changed those same opportunities were just as swiftly withdrawn (Summerfield, 1984). Sometimes it is a case of two steps forward followed by one or more steps back. The history of women's entry into journalism is full of such examples. The fact that journalism is by and large still a predominantly patriarchal field with male bosses dominating the profession and women practitioners discriminated in a large number of ways is highlighted in various academic writings. In most of the studies conducted involving the issue; the results are almost same in relation to women journalists and their challenges as such.

The paper *Women at Work: journalism as en-gendered practice* (Ross, 2001) has explored the salience of gender in the working lives of women journalists. It has drawn on data from a small scale postal survey of members of a British network of women journalists—*Women in Journalism*—conducted in 1999 and suggested that gender is important in the newsroom for some women but not others and that its impact is often felt in negative ways. Journalists pointed to some of the problems associated with working in an industry still dominated by men, such as the low priority given to coverage of "women's" issues and the male-ordered culture which can

be hostile to women with family responsibilities. Most of the women surveyed believe that more women in decision-making positions would have a positive impact on developing a more women-friendly news agenda although there were significant ambiguities about the salience of gender in determining a specifically en-gendered journalistic practice.

The article *Women as Journalists: Incompatibility of roles?* (Wijngaard, 1992) outlines the situation of women journalists in Senegal who had idealistic, ideological and economic motives for their choice of the profession. As soon as they entered the profession, they found that their professional knowledge and journalistic qualities were insufficient.

A project on the Status of Women Journalists in the Print Media initiated by the National Commission for Women was carried out to look into the issues affecting the role of women working in the print media. The Press Institute of India executed this study as part of a broader study on working women in India. Empirical data collected from almost all the States and Union Territories of the country demonstrated that women journalists portray resilience bred from years of experience. They have learnt that hard work, a supportive management, and a positive attitude can be key to success, but they have also learnt that within the newsroom, resentment, exclusion and hostility are flip sides of the coin. By and large, women journalists have a positive perspective and believe that advancement opportunities in the industry have improved over the last few years (Bhagat, undated)

*Feeling Much Smaller than You Know You Are: The Fragmented Professional Identity of Female Sports Journalists* (Hardin & Shain, 2006) is another research based on the various sports journalists that focused on whether women who succeed in sports journalism change its content towards becoming more friendly to women's sports reporting. The results of the study highlighted that newspapers with female-edited sports sections

ran slightly higher percentages of stories about women's sports than in newspapers with sports sections edited by men. But an earlier content analysis of newspapers found that journalists' sex made little difference to the amount of space afforded to women's sports (Pedersen, Whisenant, & Schneider, 2003). The study shows that women struggle to reconcile identities of woman and of sports journalist. The resulting tensions could encourage women to leave the profession in search of careers that involve less cognitive and emotional dissonance, keeping the "revolving door" for women in sports department turning. The study's findings also undercut liberal feminists' assumption that employment automatically leads to empowerment. Getting in the door, perhaps as a token hire, is easier than it has ever been. Once hired, women are socialized into a newsroom that emphasizes their inferiority in relation to journalism, and into a department that emphasizes their inferiority in relation to sports. The findings of the study by also indicate that the socialization of women into masculine oriented newsrooms may not be as pronounced as previous research indicated.

However, it is seen that some of the senior and more experienced women journalists were able to successfully advocate for women's sports coverage with their employers. Thus, the study stresses that advocacy for women's sports coverage is also advocacy for women in sports journalism; the fates of each group are intertwined. But nowadays, violence against women- sexual harassment, rape, dowry, assault, abduction and kidnapping- has become common issues around the world. Even being in an esteemed profession like journalism, women face violence. The article *Violence against women journalists* (Sreberny, 2013) talks about four different ways in which violence against women journalists occurs. One is during the course of reporting dangerous events such as wars and conflict zones where a woman journalist, much like a male journalist, simply finds herself in a dangerous context. A second form is sexual violence, which, while meted out on occasion to male journalists, is preponderantly acted out against women. A third is state-sponsored violence in the form of arbitrary arrest, imprisonment and torture of journalists, many amongst whom are women. And a fourth form includes trolling and other forms of sexualized hate speech that women encounter on the internet. The article reflected some incidents around the world in countries like Iraq and Afghanistan where journalists were killed in the wars underlining the sad truth that journalism is often a dangerous profession conducted in the most risky of contexts and the risks for women journalists are even higher.

The essay, *The struggle of women in news* (Byerly, 2013) says that women's ability to participate in their societies is bound up in their right to communicate publicly. Feminists seeking women's advancement, one of those being greater access to journalism and other media professions, have pursued obtaining the right to communicate on a number of fronts. This essay inquires to what extent women's entree to the first of these – journalism – has been successful by looking at women's participation in newsrooms (i.e. as reporters, editors and managers) and in governance (i.e. policy-making roles) of news companies, as revealed in recent research. The discussion is presented within a feminist political economy framework of analysis which helps reveal the gendered relations of power at work in news making. This essay points out the change in technologies where it talks about digital convergence (i.e. the integration of online, cable, broadcast and other formats), concentration of ownership (i.e. the diminishing number of news outlets and jobs), the rise of online reporting through internet news sites and blogging, pointing towards the question of 'symbolic annihilation' of women journalists. As per the essay, women see journalism as a route towards empowerment. Their enrolment in university journalism programmes today surpasses men's in many nations.

There are two lessons as to women's future engagement with their rightful places in news organizations (and the profession they enable) emerge from the feminist research to date. The first is that women enjoy greater progress in the news profession in general when there are national laws in place that provide the statutory basis for gender equality and structural supports for the raising of children. The second lesson, though less obvious, is that women should enter media policymaking in a more determined way to advocate for their own interests. In the broader political economy of neoliberalism that has emerged since the 1970s, men's power has been consolidated in both the financial and political realms, serving to further marginalize women.

The article argues that if women are to gain the voice they seek through journalistic practice, they have to seek organized ways to more actively engage the policies that allow this consolidation.

An essay titled *Women in decision-making structures in media* (Ross, 2001) highlighted that despite increasing numbers of women graduating from professional and vocational programmes and entering the industry they get stuck at middle management and rarely achieve the really top jobs. The study says that women continue to be under-represented in the decision-making structures of major media organizations, both at operational levels as senior managers and at strategic levels, as CEOs and board members. Importantly, the results of this study suggest that there is no clear link between the existence of gender or diversity or equality policies in organizations and high numbers of women in decision-making positions: sometimes the two things went together and sometimes not. This is largely because, unless policies are actively monitored, workforce analyses undertaken and action plans developed, then policies remain at the level of paper but not of practice. The testimonies of many of the senior women who were interviewed made clear that the cultural context, at different levels of an organization, has a significant impact on women's career prospects. In other words, a

supportive working environment which recognizes the value of women's contribution and which acknowledges their different caring and family responsibilities is as important as the existence of formal equality policies.

### **III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Focus group method has been opted for data collection for this research study.

Focus group method which is a qualitative research technique consists of small number of participants usually around six to twelve. It asks participants open ended responses conveying their thoughts or feeling about that particular issue. Focus group provides a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being studied. Group interaction and non-verbal communication are primary benefits of focus groups. A skilled facilitator can encourage group interactions to capture data to provide a more comprehensive understanding of what is being studied (Nagle & Williams, n. d.). The Focus Group (FG) method has been actually employed by marketing, but now it is becoming important in other areas; such as, education, health, management, decision-making and information systems, among others. Depending on the research objective, the Focus Group can be used alone or in conjunction with other methods. The results obtained from the FG application are particularly effective in supplying information about how people think, feel, or act regarding a specific topic (Freitas et al., 1998). Six women journalist of various media organization Inside NE, Prag News, Reporter Axom, DY 365, D News and Gplus of Asam were selected as participants to study on 'Challenges faced by women journalists in media industry'.

Serial No.	Questions	Respondents opinion
1.	<b>Do you find Media profession more challenging than other profession?</b>	<p>Respondent 1. Media as a profession is very challenging as compare to other job as it is not a job of 9 to 5 instead it is a profession of 24 into 7. It is a field oriented job which demands hard work as well as long working hours that is why working in media industry is more challenging than other industry.</p> <p>Respondent 2. This industry is full of surprises; you never know what will happen so you have to be mentally prepared for everything. Suppose your time is over and you are going back to home and if at the same time some big incident takes place then you have to cancel your plan of going home and have to work on that story. Eventualities can take place any time that is the reason this profession is more challenging than other Profession.</p> <p>Respondent 3. Media demand long working hours with less leaves and holidays and even odd working hours like early morning shifts or late night shifts. It is not a kind of 9 to 5 job. New media technologies have increased more challenges as of now a media person has to multi task, right from coverage to filing story they have to shoot the incident themselves, have to proof read and edit their copy, have to break the news on social media platforms as well. This way one has to be active all the time if he/she wishes to work in media industry.</p> <p>Respondent 4. It is a field work job not desk oriented clerical sort of job. As one has to go on field for coverage, he/she has to tackle several things and has to face many issues simultaneously has to work on 12-15 news on an average with its follow ups and updates so until and unless you multi task, you can never manage.</p> <p>Respondent 5. This industry requires lots of time, patience and courage. You cannot give quality time to your family if you are working in media industry. Managing work and family life is among major challenges of this industry.</p> <p>Respondent 6. Extra work, extra time, extra stress is there in this field so one has to get ready for all these challenges if he/she is willing to work in this industry.</p>

2	<p><b>How do you manage your professional and personal life ?</b></p>	<p>Respondent 1. Managing personal and professional life for married woman is more challenging than unmarried as responsibilities of family increases. My husband and in-laws are very supportive so for me managing personal and professional life is not that much challenging but yes as this industry demand more time sometimes my kid complain for not giving him proper time which he deserve.</p> <p>Respondent 2. Women are good managers so they know how to manage everything. They have to work as a super woman if they want to balance their professional and personal life.</p> <p>Respondent 3. Family support is needed for balancing both fronts. Time management is also required for managing office and home smartly.</p> <p>Respondent 4. Woman have to work extra if she want to be successful in her carrier in any field and this field demand more efforts which is not possible without family support. I am unmarried at present and live alone without having family responsibility so managing personal and professional life is not that much challenging for me. Because of my busy schedule my parents and siblings complaint for not giving time to them.</p> <p>Respondent 5. Just go with the flow and live in the moment everything will be managed but not without family support. Family support is life line of balancing personal and professional life.</p> <p>Respondent 6. I enjoy every moment of my work and this lovely profession. If you love your work you will not feel stress. Along with positive attitude towards your work one also need family support for balancing personal and professional life. I am lucky one, my family is very supportive.</p>
3.	<p><b>Is Media a male dominated industry ?</b></p>	<p>Respondent 1. Yes of course media is a male dominated and male oriented industry. We face gender discrimination not only in salary structure but also in work distribution as well.</p> <p>Respondent 2. Most of the female journalists cover soft beats like education, culture, fashion and lifestyle etc instead of political, economic or crime beat. Ratio of female journalists in media industry is very less as compare to their male counterparts.</p> <p>Respondent 3. If you do a survey on working journalist in media industry you will find female journalist very few in numbers. This shows that media is a male dominated industry. Female journalists are not in dominant position rather majority of them are working as subordinates in this industry.</p> <p>Respondent 4. It is a harsh truth that media is a male dominated industry. Females are not in decision making position. You will hardly find female journalists on top position like editor. One can count female editors of media organizations on their fingertip.</p> <p>Respondent 5. Females are underrepresented in media industry. They are taken for granted. As compare to electronic media their number is very-very less in print media. You will hardly find female journalists in newsrooms and editorial boards.</p> <p>Respondent 6. Whole society is of patriarchal mind set where male</p>

		<p>are in dominant position and female are their subordinate and same thing could be seen in this industry. But I think even women do not want to do challenging field work job they prefer to do desk job as they have to reach home on time for family.</p>
<p>4.</p>	<p><b>What changes are required to make this industry a friendly place for women journalist?</b></p>	<p>Respondent 1. Though the nature of this industry is not flexible but still if working moms can get flexible working hours and get the opportunity to work from home then definitely dropout rate of female journalists from media industry after marriage will decrease.</p> <p>Respondent 2. Safety and security measures for women journalists have to be taken seriously. If any female journalist is working for late night then dropping facility has to be provided by media organization.</p> <p>Respondent 3. Job security, life insurance along with medical insurance should be included in media policies.</p> <p>Respondent 4. All facilities of government job should be provided by media industry also.</p> <p>Respondent 5. We are living in a patriarchal society so our mind set has become like that only. Equal opportunities have to be given to female journalists.</p> <p>Respondent 6. Gender discrimination is the main reason for underrepresentation of women journalist in media industry. If women will get equal opportunity and equal pay then automatically their family will support them to continue their job in media industry.</p>

#### IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

There should be no gender discrimination regarding work profile and salary structure of male and female journalists in media. They should get equal opportunity. According to Majithia commission female journalists should not work in odd hours but if in any case they work for odd hours then proper pick and drop facilities should be provided to them. Flexible working hours for working moms should be considered so that dropout ratio of female journalists from media could be stopped. More and more media monitoring groups like ‘The network of women in media’ (NWMI) should join hands together with female journalists for working on this burning issue. All female journalists have to come together to amplify their voices against gender imbalance in media.

#### V. CONCLUSION

Managing personal and professional life is a big challenge for female journalists and those challenges get double after marriage and having kids. Strong family support system is required for smooth balance on both fronts. Most of the female journalists leave media industry either after marriage or after having kids because this industry demand more working hours, less holidays, no job security, no quality time for family and friends, less maternity leave, non flexible working hours. Most of the respondents were not satisfied with their job because of safety issues, more work less pay, no job security and no facilities which government employees avail. Majority of respondents accepted that challenges are more than opportunities in media industry for women journalists. Gender biasness could be seen in every media organization. Women are not decision makers in media industry. Recommendations of various working journalists’ commissions are not followed properly by media organizations. Many women journalists faced tough time at initial level. No women forum is there in any media organization where female journalists can raise their issues. Lots of changes are needed for framing new policies so that women journalists can get healthy and competitive working environment to prove their competency.

Though the scope of women journalists have increased in the present time, yet they are not free from challenges. The media organizations have to come forward with such policies that benefits the female journalists. Women today are crucial part of journalism. They are capable of financing and producing a press on their own. Today women journalists are radically changing the media and giving it a broader base by

mainstreaming health, environment, social concerns and women's issue. This profession is challenging, but more and more women are coming forward to choose Journalism as a career prospect. Today's women journalist are just not confine to the newsroom, but they are also making their mark in the field with their reporting.

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