


# Changing face of Indian Women Journalists: Narratives and Notions


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# Introduction

- Historically speaking, Journalism is a male dominated field (*Djerf-pierre* , 2007) though there have been a few exceptions.
- Women journalists especially in the Indian language press played significant role in the freedom movement.
- Hemant Kumari Chaudhurani (born:1868) became the editor of a Hindi magazine called Sugrahini
- Mokshodayani published the first issue of a Bengali magazine in 1870
- Homai Vyarawallah, the first woman photo journalist began her career in the '30s, covering all major events pre and post independence (SARCAJC, NY).

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- There was not much progress in terms of the number of women who entered the profession post independence either at the desk or as reporters.
  - From the '40s, All India Radio, the state radio did have a few women who worked as news readers and professional artistes.
  - During the '80s more women joined the profession as newscasters and anchors when the national television broadcaster Doordarshan came into being (Devender, 2014)


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- Higher levels of education, urbanization, and economic liberalization of the '90s and privatization of electronic media led to more women participation.
  - However, lack of gender equality manifests in terms of fewer women in senior positions and the pay gap that exists between male and female journalists despite the increase in the number of women journalists in the profession.

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- If that is the case, are we living in a world of ‘equality illusion’ (Barneyard, 2010 as cited in Cerqueira *et al.*, 2016)?
  - Is feminization mere numbers?
  - Do traditional organizational structures enable gender sensitive and/or non-gendered organizational culture?



# Lack of women in senior positions

- Family commitments and other responsibilities far outweigh career choices in the long run for women.
- Women find themselves juggling both responsibilities or giving up the profession because the requirements of exacting positions such as news reporter and senior editor, with daily deadlines and short delivery intervals, are difficult for most to meet

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- The rise of computerization and internet technologies has created greater opportunities to empower women and transform gender relations (Green & Adam, 1999), as women reinvented themselves and their careers.
  - This paper focuses on the issue of feminization of journalism in India as articulated by journalists interviewed in four Indian cities: New Delhi, Kolkata, Pune and Hyderabad.


# Objectives

- Through interviews of a cross section of print, broadcast and online news media:
  - Ascertain whether the ratio of male to female journalists had changed in the media outlets surveyed in the past five to ten years;
  - whether this had influenced pay, assignments, and opportunities for female journalists in the organization to any significant degree and,
  - if so, whether this had had any impact on the careers of journalists.




# Ratio of male to female journalists


- An increase in the overall number of females who are entering the profession in India, especially in the last two decades. Difficult to arrive at a definite number, given the rapid growth of the regional language media.
- One study placed the female journalists' number at 18per cent (Byerly, 2013) which at best can only be an approximation.
- Correspondingly there is an increase in the number of J Schools that offer the Journalism programs at graduate and master's level as well as a diploma.

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- Women are more likely to be found in urban and regional centres like Delhi, Kolkata, Hyderabad and Pune than in rural centres as almost all news organizations are located in Tier I and Tier II cities with a large number of employees.

# Impact of increased women journalists in media organisations


- Young women from the urban milieu or those who migrated from rural areas to cities, to pursue higher education were ready to take up jobs with irregular working hours and in places far away from home.
- Some media outlets like the NDTV television channel in Delhi and CVR Health television channel in Hyderabad have encouraged more participation of women.


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- ‘When I first started working in this company there were only five female staff, but now there are 50’ [out of a total 400 employees] said one respondent.
  - Another said. ‘That [the increase in number] is healthy competition, which is a good sign. It reflects on the growth of journalism’

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- However, as one male journalist said, ‘The share of female numbers is growing, not so much in the top management but much more at the junior level.’
  - In online media, the scenario is different; although the total number of employees is ten or below, the majority are women with no organizational hierarchy as such.


# Impact on the careers of female journalists


- Sexism and prejudices are normalized through everyday practices to such an extent that it is accepted even by women working in media outlets - evident in the study.
- The glass ceiling for women exists in terms of managerial decision making roles, equal pay, and lack of women-friendly organizations.

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- Women were thought to be more hardworking and efficient than men; but found to be more suitable for certain kind of assignments or limited in carrying out certain tasks due to their gender.
  - A newspaper manager said, ‘Women are better journalists than men and they go to any limits to get a story [sic]. I, as a manager, prefer to work with women journalists.’

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- But one male journalist said, ‘male journalists have more access in collecting news and reporting. They can work for 24 hours and in any kind of situation. With that in mind, the management takes decisions’ [to have more men than women].




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- In a reverse discrimination, there are a few who think that women manipulate. ‘By being soft spoken they have a sense of control over what they speak’ said a male journalist.
  - ‘They move up the ladder easily while males are the ones left behind. I always felt that there is discrimination against men’.

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- There are women journalists who think that they are being sent to charm and get the required information.
  - As one female journalist observed, 'I've seen people (basically bosses from other media outlets) send female journalist with the camera man to shoot and the person on screen to cover the news or to gain information to write an article/story in the newspaper. The reason behind this could be anything. May be because the girl can get information easier than a male by showing her girl charm...'[sic].


# Influence of pay and opportunities for female journalists


- All online journalists and a majority of traditional media journalists think that there is not much difference in the work environment and pay scales will be decided according to work assignments.
- ‘Whoever works hard and achieves good results will be appreciated’ said a male respondent.


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- However, there were subtle voices of discrimination that emerged. ‘It is easier for men to progress in this field. From a career point of view I firmly believe that females have lesser opportunities to grow although the work is the same for both’ said a female journalist.

# Discussions and Conclusions


- The economic liberalization in the '90s led to political and social outcomes that resulted in an increase in women in the workforce.
- Young women who opt to join the profession increased, apparent in the increase in the number of J schools that have started in the last two decades

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- Though at first glance, both male and female journalists declared that gender does not seem to influence their pay, growth in career or particular role orientations, there is an underlying normative role that is a given for the women in this profession.

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- Men think that women undersell and limit themselves to feature writing although women are better journalists than them.
  - Some women on the other hand projected their own limitation by saying that men are better at chasing investigative, crime, and sports stories

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- As a result, women journalists remain ghettoized in the area of “pink journalism”, that is, topics specifically targeted toward women, often including subjects like sex, parenting, and fashion (Vigil, 2016).
  - Surprisingly, the respondents interviewed did not think there was disparity in pay as journalists stated that pay depended on performance and not gender.
  - Yet, there were voices of dissent which articulated the management’s preference for men over women and the ease with which men could climb the professional ladder compared to women



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- On a positive note, there was a uniform perception that if women were placed in higher managerial positions, they would be better managers than men as they are more sensitive to the needs of the people in the organization.



Thank You!