CHAPTER—9

THE INDIAN SCENARIO

The media reflects the power distribution pattern in society. Hence the media is dominated by men from the urban elite who are themselves products of Western dominance of the media.

The success of women journalists today depends on their ability to better men's performance on strictly male terms.

A survey conducted in 1987 by the women and Media Group, Mumbai, on women in journalism revealed only a marginal shift in the self perception of women journalists. Though more and more women are entering journalism they generally confine themselves to women's issues that are related to soft areas of journalism, such as environment, children, human rights health & basic needs.

More than any other institution, it is the Govt. who has accounted for the largest no of women entrants into journalism. The Govt. owned radio and Television in India has more women in senior positions than the press. It is here that women have continued in their careers while many of their contemporaries in the press have dropped out.

The Indian press, vibrant and free, has seen a tremendous growth in recent years, far outstripping the growth of literacy.

Where there were 8,161 publications in the country in 1965, by 1987 the figure had reached 20,000 and was on the increase constantly.

A study of the situation of employment of women in the South Indian Media in 1987 showed continued resistance to employing women journalists. Malyalam Manorama the largest circulated daily of Kerala with a circulation of over 6.5 lakhs, did not employ women. Kerala Kamudi did not employ women. The handful of women journalists who worked in the Malayalam press held desk jobs or worked for women’s Magazines.

The Govt. controlled radio and TV in Kerala, however had a far larger percentage of women employees among presenters, artists, engineers and a woman Assistant Station Director.

The few women who rose to become Assistant Editors, Chief Reporters or Senior Correspondents did so as exceptions rather rule. No women has yet taken charge of a national daily newspaper or newsmagazine, though the Sunday Magazine sections of several dailies are being run by women. Media leadership still remains far from the reach of women journalists.

It is in the women’s magazine that the female staff has really made an impact, calling in the change from recipes, fashions and society gossip to serious scrutiny of societal concerns.
A highly motivated feminist journal like Manushi from Delhi, for instance, is very much the journalists journal too, in opening up new areas of enquiry. Similarly the Vama, a woman's magazine in Hindi, is in every sense a path breaker in this language.

An interesting study comparing Women journalists and women teachers, made by Dr. N. Hutnik and A Sachdeva, concludes that media organisations have not been able to create or maintain within their female employees a sense of being one with the institution. According to Dr. N. Hutnik and A Sachdeva "In their (women's) perception, the pre deadline syndrome round which media work revolves, is more often a symptom of editorial inefficiency and not an inevitable characteristic of a media job.

"As deadline approaches the good employee is seen not as one who works regularly and consistently but as the one who stays in the office late the night."

It is indeed the subtle nuances and in built norms of organisational behaviour that operates against the mid career women journalists.

**HISTORY OF INDIAN WOMEN IN MEDIA**

Among the nineteenth century journals were women's magazines started by reform minded Indian elites for the purpose of uplifting women of their communities.

"Masik Patrika" in Bengali was the first women's magazine (called a penny monthly in those days) published from Calcutta in 1854 and edited jointly by Peary Chand Mitra and Radhanath Sikdar. "Allaler Gharer Dulal," considered the first real novel in Bengali, was serialised in this magazine before being published as a book.

"The Indian ladies' Magazine" was edited by Kamala Ratnam Satthianadhan, was the first English language women's Magazine published from India. Sarojini Naidu's poems were first published in this magazine. K. R. Satthianadhan was the first woman graduate and M. A. in South India between 1901-1938 and the wife of an Indian Christian Social reformer.

"Bamabodhini" (1863) and "Paricharika" (1878) of the Brahmo Samaj in Bengal were the other pioneering magazines. The articles discussed the role of women in ancient Hindu society and women's education. 'Bharati' edited by Swarnakumari Devi, Hiranmayee Devi and Sarala Kumari Devi was published between 1884 and 1912.

'Savitri' in Telegu was edited by Pulugurti Lakshmi-Narasamba in the early part of the century. 'Stri Bodh' of the Parsi Community in Mumbai was published in 1857.

In Northern India Rameshwari Neheru edited an early women's magazine in Hindi 'Stri Darpan' (1909-1925). She was a relative of Jawaharlal Neheru by marriage.
Nanjanagudu Tirumalamba, an activist started the Kannada journal ‘Karnataka Nandini’ in 1916. She also started a publishing company ‘Satihitaishini’ (women’s well wisher) which not only published her own books, but also featured translations from other Indian languages. She also ran a children’s Magazine.

Other early women’s Magazine include Sundari Subodh (Gujrati), Khatoon (Urdu), Hindu Sundari (Telugu), Tehzib Niswan (Urdu) and Ismat (Urdu). Women were major contributors in most of these maganzines and they were very widely circulated.

Women activists began to use the periodical press to publicize the organisations they were seeking to build. For example, Sarala Devi Choudurani daughter of activist Bengali Brahmo parents and wife of an Arya Samaj leader wrote an article in English language journal, ‘Modern Review’, in 1911 to describe the national women’s association she was organizing. Though this organisation was not very successful two other more successful woman’s organisations:

The women’s Indian Association (1917) and the All India women’s conference (1927) established their own journals (Sri Dharma and Roshni) as integral components of their organisational efforts.

Under the leadership of committed Indian Nationalists such as the Irish Theosophist Margaret Cousins and the Punjabi Christian Amrit Kaur, these organisations and their journals pushed for political representation, education and legal reform for women as well as for Indian Independence.

Another Irish Theosophist Annie Besant also took her place alongside Indian women in the struggle for independence and women’s rights, Besant who came to India in 1893 purchased the ‘Madras Standard’ in 1914 changing its name to ‘New India’. She also edited a weekly paper. The ‘Common Weal’. Having become the voice of the Home rule movement, ‘New India’ was vulnerable to attacks. Judicial proceedings were begun against Besant, and she argued in the first proceedings before the high court. A security of Rs. 2,000 had to be paid by the newspaper. It was confiscated and a sum of Rs. 10,000 was then demanded. Besant was imprisoned for her agitation in 1917 and became a heroine throughout India. She was the first woman president of the Indian National congress and founder of the home Rule league.

Hemant Kumari (b.1868) was the first woman journalist, in Hindi, Though based in Shillong she published ‘Sugrihini’ a journal for women in 1888. Which was published in Allahabad. Hemant Kumari’s father Navin Ch. Rai who was involved in Brahmo Samaj activities greatly influenced her intellectual pursuits, since the Hindi belt was especially backwards in women’s literacy. ‘Bharat Bhagini’ was another Hindi journal brought out from Allahabad by Hari Devi in 1889, and was printed for 17 years.
Homai Vyarawalla (b 1915) from Navsari, Gujrat was the country's first woman news photographer. Starting her career during Lord Wavell's time, she began documenting the birth of a nation through her pictures, publishing her first pictures in the 'Bombay Chronicle' at the rate of Re 1 per photograph. In addition she regularly contributed to the times of India and the illustrated weekly.

During the time when the printing press was making a strong impact on the Indian psyche the electronic media namely the broadcast media was slowly making its presence felt.

A secret Radio station called voice of freedom was started by Usha Mehta with its initial broadcast on August 14, 1942. Due to the sensitive nature of Mehta's speeches on the freedom struggle, she had to keep shifting its location. The station was equipped with a transmitter, recording station, call signal and a characteristic wavelength. Mehta was eventually arrested.

These were the women pioneers in the media. Journalism as a career for women began to open up since independence. In 1971 Saroj Satya of the Times of India estimated that there were 8,782 women working at that time as journalists or in related areas. Like other countries the women of India too have found it difficult to find work as journalists. Too often their jobs have dealt with fashion, food, flower shows, and other family centered interests. As one magazine editor commented a women journalist in India has to work twice as hard as a man to prove herself in news reporting and editing.

Male Indian Journalists have not always been ready to accept women as news reporters, staff writers and editors. Long hours, travel, lack of facilities for women and the possibility of being caught in violent situations such as riots are some of the limitations women face as journalists.

In spite of the hazards if we dig out the media files of the last four decades, we find that the names of Kamala Devi Chattopadhyaya, Sarojini Naidu and Aruna Asaf Ali were household names known as 'Daughters of Liberty' to newspaper readers of that generation before Independence. And after India became free, Mrs. Asaf Ali started 'Patriot', a daily newspaper of which she continued to be chief editor till the 90s.

In the 60s India had such women as Santha Rungachary who conducted interviews during the 1965 Indo Pakistani war. Rami Chaabra served as a correspondent in Vietnam, and her stories were carried in the Manchester Guardian and the New York times as well as in Indian Papers. Harji Malik, a Bryn Maior graduate, covered the destructive cyclone and tidal waves in Andhra Pradesh in 1977 as well as the continuing recovery efforts there. Olga Tellis filed copies from the war torn Lebanon in 1976.

The most prominent women journalists are the editors of women's and young people's magazines. Among them were - Gulshan Ewing of Eves weekly, Rachel Thomas of Manorajyam (Malyalam) Anees Jung of Youth Times, Mrs.
K M Mathew of Vanitha (malyalam) and Previously Vimla Patil of Femina now replaced by Satya Saran. Apart from them. Indu Nair the associate editor of Vanitha, Fatima Zamaria associate editor of Illustrated weekly of India were a few of the others. The first Newspaper syndicate in India was started by Mrs. Kusum Nair and her husband.

Maneka Gandhi wife of Sanjay Gandhi edited ‘Surya India’ which was then published by Mrs. Amteshwar Anand.

We had Dina Vakil, the first editor of a general newspaper ‘The Independent’ of Bombay, Sucheta Dalal in Business coverage, Neerja Chowdhury, Tavleen Singh, Comi Kapoor, Bachi J. Karkaria doing current Affairs and political columns, Subha Singh covered foreign Affairs, Arati Jerath wrote for The Express, Seema Guha and Rita Manchanda were doing defense.

We also have Usha Rai who raised basic questions on the Narmada Dam project, Chitra Subramaniam filed eye opening stories on Bofors from Geneva and Aditi Roy Ghatak gave us incisive accounts of the IMF Loans discussing in depth the misuse of the monetary aids that India got from the world Bank. These were all stories with great political intent and with wide ramifications in the developmental process of Indian democracy.

In the electronic Media one of the pioneering journalists to reach topmost position in Broadcast Media was Mehra Masani who was with AIR for about forty year serving as Station Director and then as Deputy Director General until 1971 when she became one of the two Indian trustees of the International Broadcast Institute.

THE PRESENT STATUS OF WOMEN IN MEDIA
There were over 1,000 periodicals in 1971 with more than 20.5 million total circulation. Many of them are sensational weeklies. Over half the periodicals with circulation of more than 100,000 were in Indian languages. These publications were rapidly proliferating. By 1987 the total number of Registered papers rose to 26,614 among which 1,609 were dailies, 111 were Tri or Bi weeklies 6,469 were weeklies and 18,425 were others.

As far as the numbers go these figures were really flattering. But looked at from the angle of women’s representation in the structure of the mainstream media, it was indeed marginal. Even as a large number of women have joined the media industry in the last 20 years as workforce in newspapers it is hardly 5% of the total number of persons employed.

There are many women all over India who work as stringers for the large daily papers and who write interviews, poetry, short stories feature articles, or reviews for newspapers and magazines.

In 1972 the wage board for working journalists recommended a basic monthly salary of Rs. 105 for journalists working for the smallest papers and Rs. 190 for those on the stall of largest papers. Salaries are generally much larger now but still seem inadequate.
Working conditions for journalists were improved as a result of the passage (1955) of the working journalists Act which ensures security for journalists, provides for the payment of gratuities and provident funds, provides for holidays with pay, regulates hours of work, and requires notice for termination of employment.

Women are now legally entitled to three months of maternity leave with pay.

Working schedules for all the women vary, depending on the dead lines and requirements of the publications or broadcasting stations. For those who follow a regular schedule, their day usually starts at 9.30 am., and ends at 5.30 P.M.. But of course a job can never be time bound it varies with the breaking of news.

REFERENCE
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