CHAPTER IV

THE ROLE AND PROBLEMS OF WOMEN JOURNALISTS IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA

Women and Social Change in Contemporary India

The participation of women in nationalist movement automatically led the constitution of India to give women their basic right to vote from the beginning of independent period. The constitution of India also guarantees the right to equality of status, equal opportunity in education and public employment and grants special favour to women. These can be found in three Article 14, 15 and 16 of the constitution. Article 14 states that the government shall not deny any person equality before law or the equal protection of the laws. Article 15 declares that government shall not discriminate against any citizen on the grounds of sex only. No citizen shall be barred from roads, shops, hotels or public places on the grounds of sex only. Moreover, the government can pass special laws in favour of women. Similarly, Article 16 guarantees that no citizen shall be discriminated against in matters of public employment on the grounds of sex only.

Entrenchment of the equality of sexes in the constitution, consequently, resulted in the law reforms. The first set of law reforms aimed to propagate the women’s rights relating to the access of women’s education, the prevention of child marriage, the prohibition of dowry, the recognition of widow remarriage including the rights to inherit property, abortion and divorce.

Inspite of all the law reforms guaranteeing women’s freedom, yet, the position of women at the present time has not changed much. During the past decades, studies indicated that the child marriage, the prohibition of widow remarriage, the disapproval of divorce, dowry and such others was still the common practice in sub-continent. Lack of awareness among women themselves was claimed to be the factor determining the low status of women. Various facts of the status of Indian women today reveals that though Indian society now is progressing towards the 21st century, a lot needs to be done for the upliftment of women, who constitute half the population of the country.
percentage of female participation slightly declined. According to National Sample Survey organization, between 1987-1988, women worked in traditional service 25.8%, farms 21.2% and production process or manual occupations 31.5%. Between 1993-94, the percent of women in traditional service, farms, production process or manual occupations reduced to 24.7%, 19.5% and 30.4% respectively. 9

It may be noteworthy that though in the beginning of independent period, women in professions had occupied themselves with traditional jobs like teaching, nursing and social work. In course of time there has been a gradual switch over in employment of women from traditional occupations to more remunerative and higher status jobs like administrators, educators, doctors, engineers, architects, town planners, nuclear physicists, officers in community development projects, journalists and other professions. However, the opportunities for entering an occupation and progressing of educated women in these professional jobs have not increased proportionately. Moreover, these jobs have become popular only in bigger cities. It is interesting to discover that while women from lower and middle class work to supplement their family’s income, women in the upper class work mainly to develop their talent and raise their own status. 10

From 1947 onwards, Indian government has issued a variety of legislature. There was an attempt to establish legal equality between men and women and eliminate the discrimination against women on the grounds of sex. As a result, the industrial law with special enactment for women was promulgated. According to this law, there are provision relating to equal remuneration for women, maternity benefits, protection of women from being dismissed in case of maternity leave and miscarriage leave. Aside from this, the prohibition of employment of women in dangerous and hazardous tasks including the prohibition on employment of women during night in order to prevent damage and deterioration was declared too. Under this particular law called ‘Factories Act’, no women can be permitted to clean, lubricate or adjust any part of the prime mover or of any transmission machinery if such a machinery is in motion and women are not permitted to work between 7.00 p.m. and 6.00 a.m. 11

The increasing role of women in social, political and economical participation of contemporary India is often cited as the contribution of Gandhiji and Nehru. It was Gandhiji, who heralded a major breakthrough in the status of women. His vision of
freedom and equality of all classes, castes and sexes inspired a number of women from upper and middle classes to enhance their social status through involvement in the nationalist movement and take up political careers. The impact of Gandhiji’s idea bore the fruit to women in general, when Nehru realized the importance of Indian Constitution as a means to bring about equal status for women. According to study, The National Planning Committee under the chairmanship of Nehru, which appointed a sub-committee to deal with the place of women in the planned economy of India, including consideration of her social, economic and legal status, her right to hold any property, carry on any trade, profession or occupation, etc. played a crucial role in removing all obstacles or handicaps in the way of realizing an equal status and opportunity for women. The report done by the sub-committee was submitted to Nehru in 1947.  

The advancement of women’s status in contemporary India, on one hand, was in debt to the social reform and nationalist movement, as the reformists and nationalists particularly, Gandhiji felt the necessity to remove all social evils and encouraged women to participate in public activities. On the other hand, it was out of the women’s movement initiated by women themselves. The women’s movement, though, during the pre-independent period was considered only a part of nationalist movement and subject to the criticism, inability to expose the nature of oppression that affected women in different layers of Indian society. After two decades of independent period, it proved to be autonomous and critical. 

The first wave of the women’s movement in pre-independent period helped in generating a climate, which encouraged women to organize themselves and to create an atmosphere to raise the status of women, as women started coming out of the four walls to assert their political rights in the form of social equality. However, its consequence provided the benefit only to the women of urban middle and upper classes. In this account, we saw the increasing entry of women in higher education and employment only within middle class urban. The emergence of women politicians, writers and journalists, who were the leadership of the first wave of the women’s movement, are the distinctive examples of women being beneficiaries of the movement.

The first wave of the women’s movement under the leadership of upper middle class women fell into passivity for 2 decades during 1950-1970. However, around 1970s,
The period had witnessed the rise of the second wave of the women’s movement. During this period, the new women activists attempted to redefine conventional idea of women’s issues. 

The Second Wave of the Women’s Movement and the Contribution of Women Journalists in Independent India

If the pre-independent period was a birthplace of the first wave of the women’s movement, which later sprang up a few number of women venturing into pioneered Indian journalism. The independent period can be regarded as a cradle of the second wave of the women’s movement. The second wave of the women’s movement, according to feminist media scholars, plays a significant role in contributing a great number of women in contemporary Indian journalism. Since the women’s movement has been directly related to the emergence of women journalists from the dawn of journalism history, it is imperative for those, interested in the concerning subject to understand the relationship of the two.

The characteristics of the second wave of the women’s movement is distinguished from the first wave of the women’s movement in various aspects. To begin with, while the first wave of the women’s movement in late 19th – early 20th century, under the leading traditional women’s organizations like Women’s Indian Association, All India Women’s conference and many regional and local women’s clubs, Mahila Samitis, Mandals, aimed at the improvement of the status of women without challenging the fundamental ideology or value system of patriarchy. The second wave of the women’s movement in independent period particularly from 1975-1985, guided by the new established women’s organizations like Sharmaik Stree Mukti Sangathana, Nari Sangarth Samiti, Forum against oppression, Sabale, Mahila Sangarsh Vahiru, Women’s Aid Centre, feminist network, professional organization, etc., started questioning patriarchy. These new autonomous women’s groups, which basically defined themselves as ‘socialist feminist’ raised the radical issues existing in their contemporary time such as dowry, wife beating, rape, persistence of child marriage and the stigma against widows, economic hardships, the projection of women as a sex symbol by the media, working conditions, etc. Along with these mentioned issues, certain issues relating to the suffering of the
underprivileged people such as anti-price rice movement, anti-corruption movement, Chipco movement, peasant movement, distribution of land, unemployment, etc. also captured their interest. Sonia Bathla observed that unlike the first wave of the women’s movement, where feminism was subsumed under nationalism due to the great influence of male reformers and nationalists, the second wave of the women’s movement showed their independence in initiating and formulating women’s question. Further, it was more political in its approach and called for democratization in every sphere of life. To be precise, the second wave of the women’s movement focused on the ‘gender’ issues and its social, cultural, economical and political manifestations.

The relevance between the upcoming of women journalists and the second wave of the women’s movement in independent period, from the early days of independent India until the present time can be drawn into four phases. Each phase is determined by the unique socio-economic and political factors. It is however to be noted that these four phases somewhat overlap. The first phase began in the year of 1947 and carried on to the 1960s, the second phase can be traced from 1960s - early 1970s, the third phase covered 1975-1985 and the fourth phase started from 1990 to the present time.

**The First Phase of Women Journalists (1947-1960)**

The first phase of women journalists was marked by the first year of independence. On 15th August, 1947 India kept her tryst with destiny after a unique struggle for independence in which Indian women fought shoulder to shoulder with the men. During this phase, the constitution implemented from 26th January 1950, included a promise to the men and women of India, that the government of this free nation would rebuild their society with new values based on the principles of social, economic and political justice. The preamble hence assures the equality of status and opportunity among citizen. In this regard, Article 15 prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth. The same Article provides that the state may make special provisions for women and children, and that such provisions may not be an unconstitutional violation of the equality principles. The Directive Principle of State Policy also has some provisions in relation to women. According to Article 39, the state is directed to have a policy of equal pay for equal work for both men and women, and
asks the state to see that the health and strength of men and women workers is not abused. Alongside Article 42 indicates that the state must provide for just and human conditions of work and maternity relief. A provision incorporated by the 42nd Amendment in 1976 specially makes it a duty of the citizen to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women. Above all fundamental rights as guaranteed by the Indian Constitution have removed social, political and legal disabilities and inequalities from which the Indian women had suffered through centuries. 19

To achieve the goal of the constitution, the Indian National Congress, political party under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru, which formed the government, adopted socialism based on mixed economy and state support to social welfare activities. All these were expected to create a democratic, just and prosperous society. In economic front, Free India adopted a path of development based on mixed economy with great emphasis on industrialization. It accepted the pattern of dual sectors, viz. public and private. The sectors where social and economic overhead capital was large, e.g. coal, iron and steel, ship building, etc. and where capital was not likely to be attracted, the state took the responsibilities, while over the other development areas, the state has only power to regulate and control. In social welfare activities, the Government of India in 1953 established a Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB) with a nation wide program of grants-in-aid, for promoting welfare and development services for women, children and underprivileged groups. The programs were guided by the First Five Year Plan (1951 – 1956) focusing on education, health, welfare, etc., and Second Five Year Plan (1956-1961), emphasizing on social, moral, hygiene, post care services, including unequal pay, lack of adequate training facility and lack of opportunities for part-time jobs, etc., issues. The founding of CSWB, to a large extent had significant impact on women’s organizations. This was due to the fact that the traditional women’s organizations and the large number of voluntary women organizations (Mahila Mandals), which proliferated in this period, received sponsoring from the government. 20

Though the traditional women’s organizations like AIWC and women’s group (Mahila Mandals) received financial assistance and professional advice from CSWB, they did not give impetus to the women’s movement. On the contrary, they lost their earlier dynamism. As the nature of their activities was shaped by CSWB welfare
approach, insisting on the expansion of girl’s education, rural welfare services and condensed course for adult women, later, they therefore lost the sensitivity of other contemporary women’s issues. Kamaladevi, the veteran woman leader described the decline in women’s movement as the process for which women, who had poured into the freedom struggle, had slipped back into their old groove. The women leaders too had got settled in new social grooves of power and position that independence had thrown up. They forged no more links with the wide mass of women. In fact, they considered the mass of women only as the security of their ballot papers.

The slipping back of women into their domestic sphere under the complacent atmosphere of the women’s movement during this period was determined by various factors. The hostile attitude towards working women by society, which still prevailed in those days could be considered one of them. Shruti Tambe explained that after independence women were pushed back to the domestic sphere, because their comrades in the nationalist struggle no longer needed them in the public sphere. This was evident in the First Five Year Plan where women were figured under health services for mother and children, reiterating and reinforcing their typecasting as mothers. Similarly the Second Five Year Plan for welfare of women and children was combined again in the context of family planning program. Besides, the slow pace of women’s higher education was another factor that barred women from stepping into the professions. The studies on the proportion of female students to the total enrollment in Indian universities revealed that there was only 13 % of female students in 1955-1956, 17 % in 1960-1961 and 21 % in 1965-1966. Other factors such as the limitation in scope of working, the lack of chance in training profession and the lack of confidence for working outside among women themselves, etc., were also important factors that determined the condition of women in this particular time.

All these aspects had an impact on women lives in those days, not only in the matter of chance of getting a job, but in the choice of profession too. Available documents on women and work in the early years of independence demonstrated that Indian women would prefer to join ‘feminine’ careers divided by gender base like nurse, teacher, public service (in supportive post), social worker etc., rather than ‘masculine’ careers like journalist, lawyer, manager, entrepreneur, etc. The preconception that
publications for women. Amidst this change, Ratan Karaka introduced a women’s page in ‘Current’, a newspaper owned by her brother. Frene Talyakhan was the first woman to edit two magazines – ‘Trend’ and ‘Flair’ at a time when women’s magazines were still overseen by men. In 1959, after selling Fair to The Times of India group. She became the first editor of Femina, its new women’s magazine. The staff of Femina under the editorship of Frene Talyakhan were Ina Sen, who worked as the assistant editor, Vimala Patil, Anita Sarkar and Nina Merchant. In 1966 Patil, was the assistant editor, replacing E-wing, who had move to ‘Eve’s Weekly’. She became the editor of Femina in 1973 and was the third editor of this magazine and second female to be so. Patil remained at the post for 20 years. During this particular time appeared also a few number of freelance journalists. Hilla Vaikil and Geeta Sinha were among the early freelancers, while Nuru Chagla was another name working around the same time.²⁹

In Delhi, Kamala Mankekar was among the handful of women in the mainstream newspapers. After a few months in the ‘Indian News Chronicle’, she joined ‘The Times of India’ in 1950. According to her, by then ‘The Statesman’ had two women on the staff in the capital: Raj Chawla who was on the desk and Amita Malik, who reigned supreme among the film critics of the capital and began the first radio column in the country known as ‘Listening Post’. In addition, Pramila Kalhan wrote for ‘The Hindustan Times’. Aruna Mukherji and Amrita Rangaswamy, both of ‘The Indian Express’, were among the first women to become assistant editors of a major newspaper. Anjali Sinha wrote first ‘The Hindu’ and Shanta Rungachary – earlier the first woman trainee in ‘The Indian Express’ – work for ‘The Statesman’, while Vidya Nehru who joined the ‘National Herald’ in Lucknow was the first woman to work on the night shift. The other women journalists in English press during this specific time were ‘Blue’ Rangnathan, M. Ratnakumari and Anjali Sarkar nee Sengupta, Shakuntala Srivastava Manasi, Mrs. B. K. Karanjia and Uma Anand – the original ‘Aunty Wendy’ of the Illustrated Weekly (Mumbai), Mrs. Kooper (Bangalore) and Coleen Gantzer (a Kochi base freelance travel writer).³⁰

One fact which is strikingly apparent in this phase is that though a number of women journalists made their contribution both in English newspapers and women magazines, the editors of both medium were still men.
In the vernacular press, there are few documents about women journalists. The prominent ones were Jaloo Kanga, Leela Parulekar and K. Rama Lakshmi.

In Parsi – Gujarathi, language, Jaloo Kanga a teenaged bride, was catapulted into the world of journalism by her father-in-law in 1944 while she was travelling from rural Gujarat to metropolitan Calcutta. Her father-in-law founded the Parsi-Gujarathi publication ‘Navroz’ as his contribution to the nationalist enterprise. According to her daughter, she was only the ‘Navroz’ joint editor as her father still kept the top notch for himself.

In the Marathi press, publisher – editor Leela Parulekar was active in the Pune based ‘Sakal’. In 1950s, Mrs. Gadgil used to look after the paper’s children page in ‘Loksatta’. Later in 1960 Lata Raje joined the same paper.

In Telegu, a journalist in Hyderabad said Ramalakshmi, a sub-editor in the Telegu ‘Swatantra’, was the first woman in Telegu journalism. Unfortunately, there is no record in other vernacular languages.

The Second Phase of Women Journalists (1960-1975)

The second phase of the relationship between women journalists and the second wave of the women’s movement can be traced back from the year of 1960 to early 1970s. From 1960 onwards quite a number of women stepped into the mainstream commercial press. Apart from the advancement of education taken up by girls in general, journalism as a course being available in various universities around the country was another reason that encouraged women to join this profession. Ammu Joseph, the well-known journalist and researcher, described that this course was obviously attractive to educated women who did not fancy traditional avenues of employment. According to her, several women journalists of this phase graduated with journalism course, for example, Prabha Dutt, Jyotsana Kapoor and Razia Ismail. They were students of the post-graduate diploma course in journalism, offered by Punjab University in Chandigarh. Bachi Kakaria also did a similar course in Calcutta University before joining the training scheme of ‘The Times of India’ in Mumbai. Some, like Coomi Kapoor and Dina Vakil, even went overseas for journalism studies.
In English language, there were many women journalists who contributed to the press both in newspapers and magazines. The prominent ones among them were, Usha Rai, Prabha Dutt (nee Behl), Razia Ismail, Jyotsana Kapoor, Neena Vyas, Modhumita Majumdar, Zinat Imam, Rami Chhabra, Rashmi Saxena, Madhu Jain, Coomi Kapoor and Tavleen Singh (in Delhi), Olga Tellis, Zarine Merchant, Fatima Zakaria, Elizabeth Rao, Bachi Karkari, Dina Vakil and Carol Andrade (in Mumbai), Anjali Sarkar, Gita Aravamudan and Rima Kashyap (in Bangalore), and Kalyani Shankar in Hyderabad.

1960s also witnessed a larger number of women participating in vernacular journalism. For example in Maharashtra, Indubai Tilak was one of the first persons to take advantage of the first journalism course offered in Pune, which began in 1962. Later she became known as the first woman in Marathi journalism. Indubai was a daughter-in-law of Bal Gangadhar Tilak – a well known leader of the freedom movement and founder – editor of the journal, ‘Kesari’.  

Around the same time in 1964, in Pune, Vidya Bal joined ‘Stree’, a progressive magazine for women as a sub-editor. She became its editor in 1983 but left in 1986. In 1966, Lata Raje joined ‘Loksatta’ in Mumbai and is still an assistant editor with the paper. In 1969, Neelam Upadhya managed to get into the Maharashtra Times. However, by and large the number of women journalists in this phase was not high. The study on employment of professional women in public and private sectors indicated that in entire India in the year 1963, there were only 101 women journalists and editors, 109 in 1964, 107 in 1965 and 99 in 1966. Further the figure showed that the number of women journalists and editors in private sector was lower than public.

The slow growth of the number of women journalists in this phase was consonant with the placid and peaceful socio-economic and political scenario of the early 1960s. During this time, feminism, which is termed as liberation of women and humanitarian in its ultimate sense, did not yet set firm its root in Indian Society. The Third Five Year Plan (1961-1966) and Fourth Five Year Plan (1969-1974) concentrating on education and family planning also proved to be inefficient in implementing, although the government realized the defect of welfare approach. Further, from the late 1960s to the early 1970s the socio-economic and political atmosphere had undergone dramatical change. Economically, this period had been marked by economic crisis and stagnation, rising
prices, increasing landlessness and generalized discontent both in rural and urban areas resulted from privatization of mix economic policy. The crisis had worst effect on women, leading to the phenomenon on feminization of poverty and unemployment. The policy of economic development, which relied heavily on high technology, multinational collaborations, export promotion and encouragement to private sector proved to be an illusion for the development of women because it only paved the way for a high degree of concentration of capital and extreme exploitation of women. Politically, the left was fragmented by the break up of CPIM (Marxists) and CPIML (Marxist-Leninist). What was significance during this time was that women’s issues, which had been silent in the previous decade were taken up by women’s organizations and media. Paralleling with women’s issues, the crisis of mid and late 1960s gave rise to a radicalization process of the mass of the struggling working class. In brief, women journalists as well as activist women were mobilized in large numbers and they participated in the general struggles of the rural poor, tribal and industrial working class.

The resurgence of the ‘new’ wave or the ‘second’ wave of women’s movement was spontaneously shared by the press. They played a vital role in dissemination social and women’s issues. Under this radical atmosphere, many women journalists tried to escape from the customary news report. A number of them studied and managed to shift from soft women’s issues to serious ones. The attempt of women journalists to be a part of the women’s movement in this phase, though gaining a little success in pressurizing the media to focus on serious women’s and social issues, their action nonetheless was admirable as it produced the seeds of development journalism to the next phase.

The Third Phase of Women Journalists (1975-1990)

The third phase of the relationship between women journalists and the second wave of the women’s movement covered approximately the years between 1975-1990, which witnessed The Women’s Decade (1975-1985). The year 1975, when Mrs. Indira Gandhi was the Prime Minister of India was important to the women of India and also of the world because it was The International Women’s Year, declared by the United Nations. The general aim of The International Women’s Year (IWY) was to raise the
status of women throughout the world. Studies on the status of Indian women in these particular years confirmed the pitiable and derogatory condition of women which modern society was providing to them. The prepared report on the status of women published in ‘Toward Equality’ in 1974, before submitted to the United Nation in 1975 indicated that the equality and justice guaranteed by constitution since 1947 had not been met for women. Authors of this report charged that women’s status had not improved but had in fact declined since independence. To solve the problems faced by women in this period, the government, therefore, re-evaluated the welfare approach and came out with the new perspective. Consequently, in the Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-1979), there was a shift from traditional way of perceiving women as targets for welfare and development projects to consider women as partners and participants in planning. Further, the Sixth Five Year Plan (1980-1985) introduced some major changes in program for women. The Plan for the first time incorporated notion of women and developments. However, the Plan was criticized by feminists as being masculine character, since its measurement was conducted without a qualitative assessment of what development is meant to the lives of women in terms of the availability of the very basic necessity of life.

The Women’s Decade initiated by The International Women’s Year stormed a tremendous number of women entering into journalism. The increase in the number of women journalists particularly in print media in this phase resulted in the highlighting of important women’s issues. The increase of credibility of women’s issues in turn helped women journalists to get more stories and columns. Some women journalists, who were deeply attracted by women’s issues, even went further to form media monitoring groups, such as ‘Women’s Media Action Group’, ‘Committee on Portrayal of Women in Media’, ‘Women and Media Group in Bombay’. The participants of these groups included journalists, researchers and activists. They organized workshop, joint programs with women’s rights organizations, encouraging full time activists and researchers to write for the mainstream media. As a result, many of them had come out with valuable investigative reports on communal riots, Sati, etc.

The effort in promoting women’s cause carried by women journalists was never isolated. In fact, they were cooperated by filmmakers, play writers and scriptwriters, who also got sensitized on women’s issues. The role played by women journalists in press
during this phase was complimented by a number of media researchers. According to them women journalists in this phase were not only sincere and serious about their creative work, but they were highly professional, who had over come the stereotype of women’s page and could establish themselves as top notch first grade women writers too. Further they were also aware of gender discrimination existing in journalism. Such awareness was clearly shown in their attempt to demand the better condition at work like promotion possibilities, removing of discrimination and harassment from boss, etc. through professional organization.

The factors exacerbating the increasing number of women journalists in this phase were attributed to the change of internal socio-economic and political scenario as well as the growth of feminist movement in the international level. Sonia Bathla asserted that the problems associating with political repression, the failure of the Indian Government to fulfill the economic needs of poor people and its disregard towards human rights, etc., which later led to the state turmoil in 1970s and finally ended up with the declaration of emergency by Indira Gandhi was considered to be the internal factor. The international factor rested on the adoption of the elimination of discrimination against women in 1967, and the declaration of The International Women Year in 1975. According to Suma Chitnis, the central theme of The International Women’s Years focused on quality, development and peace emerged from the major objective set for IWY by the United Nation. It aimed to promote equality between men and women, to ensure the full integration of women in the total development effort, especially by emphasizing women’s responsibility and important role in economic, social and international levels, particularly during the Second United Nations Development Decade; in order to reconcile the importance of women’s increasing contribution to the development of friendly relations and cooperation and to strengthen world peace.

In response to the international decade of women from 1975 to 1985, it was reported that various governments were being pressured by the international agencies to prepare status reports on women and to set up mechanism to promote women’s position. Further, there was also wide pressure from women’s organizations themselves. In this regard, domestic violence was considered an issue that the women’s movement had made it visible through pressing for legislation and bringing it into public notice.
The women’s organizations involving with women as well as social issues during this time were radical by characters. Their ideology extremely differed from the women’s organizations descending from the social reform and nationalist movement of pre-independent period. In this particular context, while the traditional women’s organizations like AIWC and Mahila Mandals (women’s groups) were still insensitive to contemporary women’s and social issues as they were busy with organizing cookery, embroidery classes, bhajans, picnics, beauty contests, fashion shows and other cultural activities. The new autonomous women’s organizations defining themselves as ‘socialist feminist’, such as Shramik Stree Mukti Sangathana, Nari Sangarth Samiti, forum against oppression, Sababala, Mahila Sangarsh Vahini, Women’s aid centre, Feminist net work, etc. took a militant role in coping with the concerned issues and viewed it with feminist perspective. These new types of women’s organizations, which were not affiliated to any political party or religious groups, had a major concern in fighting against oppression, exploitation and degradation of women. They had tremendous militancy and a readiness to come to the streets with their demands. Initially, they attracted educated urban women, but gradually mass organizations working among women in small towns and villages were also influenced by them.  

It is worth noticing that during this period women and media groups played a vital role in highlighting important issues and the liberation of the conference in the press handout. Besides, professional women’s organizations such as doctors, lawyers, scientists, researchers, journalists, etc. also responded enthusiastically towards the call for international decade of women. They worked on different fronts like popularizing science, health, academic, law and media, etc. To make it more precise, they sought to agitate against discrimination and more often create alternate channels for professional activities. In addition, among the member of these new women’s organizations, some
of them had linked with the left parties. Nevertheless, such connection did not affect the activities of women’s group because its relationship limited only at individual level. Regarding the women’s movement in relevance with journalism in the late 1970s and early 1980s, R. K. Tandon concluded that the movement comprised a large number of autonomous women’s groups, replacing the All India Women’s Organization. These autonomous women’s groups joined not through the structure of a formal association, but through the connections of their leader. All above, the period also saw the rise of feminist press including the coverage of women’s issues in a large-scale from general media and periodical.  

After the declaration of International Women’s Year and Women’s Decade, suddenly women’s issues and concerns were attended a great deal of importance and wide coverage was given to them. This particular event apparently occurred because the women’s organizations like Munushi, Saheli, MDs were very active in holding demonstrations and raising the issues. In such situation, henceforth, the media was compelled to take note of these developments. During this time it is noticeable that despite the majority of women journalists did not associate with women’s groups or organizations, they participated actively as sympathizers in writing on women’s issues. At the same time social issues in which women were directly involved were also frequently reported by some women journalists with keen interest. Relating to this matter, the feminists added that, among the large number of women in journalism, many of them, who were sensitive to women’s cause chose to cover these issues regularly. This situation was also confirmed by some women journalists. They stated that in the 1970s and early 1980s a large number of women journalists were the supporters of women’s cause and hence they paid greater attention to women’s issues. In print media or press, from 1975-1985 the study found that there was a great increase in the number of women journalists as well as a great concern of women’s and social issues written by women journalists themselves.

The international decade of women not only marked a large number of women journalists, contributing to women’s and social issues in both newspapers and magazines, it also witnessed the new area of news coverage. The study on women journalists revealed that, since 1980 onwards, women journalists took progressive steps in
profession as they started venturing into the so called ‘hard news’ like, politics, economics, foreign affairs, etc. These women in fact, were the first generation of women journalists, who broke up the traditional belief that women are not capable in ‘hard news’ reporting and analysis. Considering this event, the women journalists ascertained that in the 1970s and early 1980s, women journalists working in ‘hard’ areas of the economy and politics were rarities. But after 1985 a lot of rethinking was done by women journalists. Since they did not want to be stereotyped by covering women’s issues alone, they walked out of this area. Similarly the activists insisted that as political and economic issues got more weight than women’s issues in the news hierarchy, a feeling of discomfort led many women reporters to walk out of writing on women. Joseph and Sharma also noted that in the 1980s, women journalists moved to hard areas of economics and politics. Today these women are ‘by and large’ wary of being labeled as feminist, of being associated with the women’s cause and even of being categorized as women journalists.59

The example of pioneer women journalists venturing into political beat was Olga Tellis. She was the first woman reporter in the city of Mumbai. According to Ammu Joseph she was the first woman to be hired by the ‘Ananda Bazar Patrika’ group anywhere, and she remained the only woman covering politics and economics there for several years. Another was Kalyani Shankar. In mid 1970s, she began working in Hyderabad where she was the only woman journalist in the city. In the early 1980s, Manini Chatterjee was the only woman in the press gallery of parliament. As the only woman covering the congress of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) in Thiruvananthapuram in 1989, Chatterjee received request for interviews from local journalists.60

The prominent women journalists dealing with women’s issues in this phase were serious and highly professional, among them was Rami Chhabra. She was the one who regularly highlighted and analyzed the infamous Mathura rape case in feminist column on the editorial page of mainstream English newspaper, ‘The Indian Express’.61 In the mid 1980s Shahnaz Anklesaria, as a legal correspondent of ‘The Statesman’, began a column called ‘women and law’, Shakuntala Narasimhan wrote on aspects of women’s status in society, Ayesha Kagal often focused on women articulating their feelings and aspirations
in society, and Shahnaz Anklesaria ran a regular column on law pertaining to women.

In brief, there were so many of them who kept their ears on women and social issues especially among those women journalists, who at time were also activists like Jyoti Punwani, Gouri Salvi and Ammu Joseph. They used their lunch break and their own meager funds to book Cama Hall in Mumbai for the first public meeting organized by what was then known as the forum against rape, a women’s group, which came into being in the aftermath of the Mathura rape case. Also in Mumbai, several journalists, including Punwani, Salvi, Suchitra (now Vemeri) and others, were involved in bringing out Raksha, a publication of the committee for the protection of democratic rights. Besides, Olga Tellis filed a case relating to the rights of Mumbai’s pavement dwellers in the Supreme Court. She also took a month’s leave from work to participate in a major movement launched by farmers in order to have better understanding of their problems.

In addition, freelance journalist Shiela Barse filed petitions in Mumbai’s central jail as well as established her right to inform about conditions in such public institutions. Her efforts on behalf of women incarcerated in a so-called protective home in Agra prompted a well-known lawyer to file a case in the apex court in this regard. Likewise, Neerja Chowdhury filed a petition in the Supreme Court to pressurise a state government into fulfilling its promises about rehabilitating bonded labourers who had been freed amidst much publicity. To be precise, these women journalists contributed significantly to the socio-economic and political change of this period.

The sincerity of women journalists in this period was an evidence of a number of them who won PUCL India Today award for human rights, Eve’s Weekly award for women’s issues and Chameli Devi award for the payroll of national cause. Regarding PUCL award, it was reported that around 1980s Neera Chowdhary won PUCL award 1984 for her persistent exposures of the exploitation of bonded labour, the Maya Tyagi case, and the suffering of children in Tihar Jail among other investigations. Sheila Barse, the fiery freelance journalist, gained recognition for her many exposures from the Billa tapes to the condition of women in Bombay’s brothels. She also received the same honour with the report on women prisoners, for which she had to cross the increasing hurdles placed by Indian policemen. Shahnaz Anklesaria also won the same award in human rights journalism for her devotion to a free and open society and the perseverance.
thoroughness and dedication with which she laboured to secure and defend civil liberties and human rights of the disadvantaged in the country. Shahnaz got an award for the whole body of her work in contrast to the previous winners who had won the same award for individual stories.  

In other awards, the study found that Mala Jain, one of the leading correspondents of India Today was once the winner of the Eve’s Weekly Women Journalists Award. R. Purnima, who worked for the Kannada Weekly ‘Sudha’ won the same award for her article on agricultural women and their travails in the state. Madhu Kishwar and Kalpana Sharma, editor of ‘Manushi’ and then editor of ‘Express Magazine’ respectively, won the Chameli Devi Awards in two different years. Further, Tavleen Singh won the Sanskriti award for distinction in field of journalism. In addition, Saraswati Ghosh, a journalist in West Bengal, won an award for her article on the exploitation of Adivasi women in Bihar by outsiders as well as their own men.  

In the area of hard news, this phase saw many women participating actively in politics, economics, foreign affairs, etc. Women journalists like Seema Gahu, Seema Mustafa, Anita Pratap, Radhika Rameseshan, Ritu Sarin, Shiraz Sidhwa, Tavleen Singh and others were among those widely being recognized for their reportage from the hot spots in and around the country: Kashmir, Punjab, the North eastern State and Sri Lanka. Many of them broke exclusive stories and / or got exclusive interviews with leaders of the militant’s organizations central to the conflicts in each place.  

Some of women journalists ventured even in further field, for instance, Mustafa arranged to be smuggled into Beirut in the early 1980s and stayed for three weeks. She was the only Indian journalist covering the conflict from within the besieged city. Other women, who made their names in the field of political reporting or analysis or both in the English language dailies, were Neerja Chowdhury, Smita Gupta, Coomi Kapoor, Kalyani Shankar, Vidya Subramaniam, Neera Vyas, Amrita Abraham from Delhi, Olga Tellis from Mumbai; Shikha Mukherjee from Calcutta; Rasheeda Bhagat and Malini Parthasarthy from Chennai.  

In regional language press, information from activists in different parts of the country suggested that the regional press in this phase mostly remained conservative, tradition-bound and hostile to feminist ideas. For instance, several prestigious newspapers
in the state of Kerela, including the Malayala Manorama, Kerela Kaumudi, did not employ women. A report done by women’s group on Perspectives for the Autonomous Women’s Movement in India revealed that while the image of the women’s movement was generally favourable in the English Press, the picture was different when it came to the Gujarati, and Hindi press. Except for the Express group and for two columns, nothing positive was to be found in the Gujarati press, which according to those familiar with it had always been anti-women, anti-worker and anti-Dalit. The hostile attitude towards ‘feminist’ ideas in Gujarathi press showed in a short piece by Vibhuti Patel in Counter media, No.4, 1987. It confirmed that the conservation in the Gujarathi press did exist. The Hindi press, which could be summed up in one word ‘dreadful’, mocked women’s issues and the movements. Unlike the Hindi and Gujarathi press, the Marathi press had reported the women’s movement favourably. This was partly because the activists themselves frequently contributed articles and besides that the other progressive movements in Maharashtra also had an impact on the general consciousness of people. In Tamil language, during 1986-1987, a few serious articles on women’s issues began to appear in the serious, small circulation Tamil journals. However, when even mildly feminist’s ideas were expressed in the mass circulation magazines, there was usually an onslaught of adverse male opinion attacking such writers.

The repercussion of the international year and decade for women did not limit only within the newspapers, but it also affected to the women’s magazines. The study in women’s magazines, revealed that from the late 1970s - early 1980s, women journalists in the movement (as activists or sympathizers) contributed to the visibility of contemporary women’s issues in the newspapers and magazines. The wide coverage of women’s issues in mainstream media (newspapers) was responsible for paving a way to women’s magazines. As Ammu Joseph wrote, “Coverage in the mainstream press not only increased public awareness of both issues and the movement, but also made it easier for interested editorial staff within women’s magazines to orient their publications towards issues of serious concern to women”.

During the period of magazine boom around late 1970s and early 1980s, as women’s issues were a part of media, mix women’s column and new glossiness on women was on rise. By the end of the decade, the process of legitimization of the
women’s question in the mainstream media had reached its peak. Consequently, in the 1980s feature special supplements and new magazines exclusively addressing women had increased. Enormous salability of women’s specific item was the main reason for which commercial media suddenly showed enthusiasm towards ‘women’s question’. Further, they never missed a chance to have a dig ‘feminist’ or ‘women’s movement’ or ‘women’s libbers’. Among the commercial women’s magazines in English ‘Eves Weekly’ was given more credit than others for its contribution to women’s cause. ‘Femina’, though being a member of Times of India group seemed to have poorer coverage in women’s issues compared to ‘Eves weekly’. Despite this fact, Vimala Patil the editor of ‘Femina’ in those days, claimed that contemporary women’s issues and movement were featured in ‘Femina’ mainly because she supported women’s movement. In ‘Women’s Era’, the editorial policy was more conservative and traditional than that of ‘Eve’s Weekly’ and ‘Femina’. The magazine seldom carried women’s issues. On the contrary, the role of women as ornamental wife, hardworking housewife and mother was highly emphasized.

In spite of the facts that the commercial press in this phase carried a vast number of news reporting and articles on women and social issues, as many daily newspapers had started a women’s page or column. The commercial press was criticized by women’s groups and researchers. According to them, the image of women projected by press seemed to be distorted from the reality. Women were shown merely as passive victims of crimes perpetuated on them. Such reporting only perpetuated the situation and the feeling of women’s powerlessness. There was no attempt to dig deeper into the facts of the case and do any follow-up on the development of the police and court proceeding, and the situation of the women concerned. Often, when the accused man went scot-free or paid only an insignificant fine, this fact went unnoticed and unreported by the press. The sensationalization in the reporting of the occurrences, the piling up of the reports and statistics of gruesome dowry death, rape, etc., often led to a growing desensitization of these issues. Moreover, there was little analysis of the underlying causes, the root situation of which these extreme manifestations were but the tip of the iceberg.

The distortion of women’s reality and other social movements portrayed by commercial press, in fact, functioned as a means to maintain status quo and support the stability of an existing system. In sum, the three main accusations leveled on the coverage...
of women in news and the press by feminist were (i) women were depicted mainly as second class human beings (ii) women and women’s issues were under-represented and (iii) the press was distorting the women’s movement. It was true that some of the reporting on women’s issues had been quite sensitive, but the news coverage in general was under distortion, misinterpretation and titillation. Women therefore necessarily needed the alternative media to raise their own voice.  

The ‘alternative’ media on this particular context could be termed as ‘feminist’ media. It came into existence precisely because of the inadequacies of the mass media in dissemination of information relevant to women and presenting the feminist perspective on a range of issues concerning women. There were different kind of alternative media, both print and audio-visual, as well as adaptation of culture and art form like cinema, theatre, song and street play. Among them special mention must be made of the emergence of newsletters, journals and even book production with feminist perspective.  

Alternative media an independent but contemporary development grew from a dissatisfaction with the viewpoint and subject matter of the traditional media. The alternative journals pointed out flaws in society that the mainstream press had tended to disregard. In comparison with the mainstream press, the alternative journals were distinguished primarily by their more radical approach. They aimed to disseminate the news, information and opinion about the women, the poor and the young.  

As the objective of alternative media was not merely against the misportrayal of women, but simultaneously create alternatives, its objective had very close link with social and women’s movement. The alternative media however, found its readership only within the circle of middle class intellectuals.  

In press, the alternative media of this phase appeared in the form of women’s magazine, for example ‘Baija’ (Marathi), ‘Manushi’ (English and Hindi) and ‘How’ from New Delhi, ‘The Now’ defunct socialist feminist network (Bombay), ‘Sangarsh’ (Hindi, Patna), ‘Nari Mukti’ in Gujarati and several others. There were also newsletters, such as ‘Women’s News’ (Women centre, Bombay) and ‘Saheli’ newsletter (Delhi) or the Tamil language ‘Pennurami Iyyakkam’ and ‘Rural Women’s Liberation Movement’s’ newsletters. There was a magazine in Assamese published by Dibrugarh Mahila Samtha called ‘Aeideor Jonaki Bat’ and another called ‘Ardh Akash’. From academic, came
‘Samya Shakti’ and the Indian Association of Women’s Studies bulletin as well as the SNDT Research Unit’s newsletter. Besides there were some specialized women’s journals like ‘Stree’, ‘Andolan’ and ‘Banti’ etc. circulated among women’s groups and their supporters. However, as these alternative magazines and journals were not commercial based, and had the limitation of reaching target readers, after a few years most of them had folded up due to the lack of funds. The only one, which survived until today is ‘Manushi’, but its Hindi edition had to be discontinued because it had to rely on translation in the absence of good Hindi articles. The study of alternative media confirmed that among the alternative press, probably it was only Manushi that could reflected its rapport with its reader while the others did not last long because it could not clearly identify its readers needs.

It is important to note that though the alternative media aimed to function as a means to propagate women and social movement, they were never to and could not replace the commercial newspapers and magazines, which had tremendous legitimacy and reach to a wide range of people. To quote S. Eashwar, “There are some specialized women’s journals, circulated among women’s groups and their supporters who are doing this kind of writer – journals like Manushi, Stree, Andolan, Banhi etc. But though doing good work, their reach is limited. They can’t inform and persuade as many readers as the mass circulation newspapers and magazines”.

Shoma A. Chatterjee’s opinion on alternative media is notable. She pointed out the reason as to why feminist magazine defunct. According to her, firstly, the feminist paper did not succeed in getting sponsors or advertisement. In the other words, there was lack of success to financial resources; secondly, the feminist magazine did not have access to the conventional channels of distribution; thirdly, it addressed itself to a narrow audience deliberately and by design: and fourthly it had a very independent editorial stand.

With special reference to alternative media like newsletters and journals with feminist perspective, Desai and Krishnaraj commented that among alternative to glossy women’s magazines, ‘Manushi’ was the only feminist journal, which had become a forum for women to speak out, to share their experiences to get expression of their creativity. Another journal was ‘Samya Shakti’, an annual journal of centre for women’s
development. The journal focused more on academic discussion. In addition, an attempt to present positive feminist approach was also found in other regional language journals and newsletters. 87

Manushi, the sole survivor of the feminist press of contemporary era, appeared to the public eyes when the majority of commercial press tended to ignore and distort the reality of the respective movements as it potentially threatened the status quo and the stability of an existing system. It’s editor was Mrs. Madhu Krishwar, the journalist and scholar who bravely proclaimed “To talk about Indian women and women’s movement is ridiculous unless you systematically attempt to understand who these Indian women are”. 88 In the initial years, while the magazine was running, Manushi had been very active in raising the issues and holding the demonstrations that the police and journalists used to reach the spot at one call. In such a situation, the media was compelled to take note of this development. 89 The women’s issues focused by Manushi, the premier feminist journal of India were, sexual harassment, the adjustment expected from a new bride, violence against women in the home and as a weapon of political and social control, history and literature on, about and by women and social political / economic issues such as communalism and public health policy. 90

Manushi’s birth coincided with a new phase in political life of the country following the emergency. It was the only paper, which dared to focus on women’s and social issues as its primary concern, while other main stream newspapers chose to remain silent under the declaration of emergency during Indira Gandhi’s term. From the very beginning, Manushi did not align with a political party, nor did it adopt anyone sectarian line on women’s issues. In fact, it made an effort to keep the magazine an open forum for a wide variety of political opinions. 91

Manushi was an actual work of Madhu Krishwar, the founder who had been involved in a Delhi University based women’s group in 1977. The inspiration of the paper came from the need to create women’s own forms of communication after hearing stray report about sporadic women’s struggle in different parts of the country. It aimed to encourage the kind of writing, which focused on the concrete realities of women’s lives and dealt with specific groups of women or specific events and issues among different castes, class communities, regional and occupational groups rather than concentrated on
the general issues of women’s movement. To reach the mentioned goal, Manushi refused to accept grant or funding from any institution, Indian or foreign, governmental or non-governmental as it would cut the autonomy of the magazine. The magazine also denied accepting income from any advertisements. Thus the income, which Manushi received, was only based on subscription and its own funds through limited donation from individuals. For these reasons, the magazine would not depend on any one particular donor. Initially Manushi encountered financial problem due to its own account was exhausted, but in course of time the situation has slowly improved.

Manushi did not just limit its scope to print but went further to participate in social activities as activists. The office of Manushi functioned not only as a workplace but also as a meeting place for women, a place which had provided help to numerous women in distress, a place where women could seek free legal advice and so on.

Gathering from the documentation with reference to Manushi, one has no doubt in their sincerity towards women’s cause and society at large. Vimal Balasubhrmanyam spoke of Manushi with admiration that when Manushi, the first feminist magazine in this country, came into existence it ushered in feeling of hope and celebration among the progressives in different parts of the country. Unfortunately, the journal had to discontinue its Hindi edition but the English one is going strong and hopefully will, for many more years. Similarly Nandita Gandhi and Nandita Shah held the view that with the sole exception of Manushi there was no influential alternative journal or newsletter at the national level. The dearth of the theoretical debate and exchange of information on programs and activities according to them was responsible to this situation. They further remarked that though the mainstream media have a tremendous legitimacy and reach to a wide range of people, it also have limitation in information dissemination as the newspapers and magazines are commercial venture catering not vehicles for analytic discourse or consciousness raising.

The Present Phase of Women Journalists (1990-present)
The correlation between the women journalists and women’s movement in the present phase began since the year 1990. The new economic policy with more emphasis on privatization and liberalization launched by the Prime Minster of India, Mr. Narsimha
Rao, not only stiffed the women’s movement as it withdrew the financial aid sponsoring women’s organizations, parallely it also introduced intensively ‘consumerism’ to Indian society. Shruti Tambe observed that from 1990 onwards, India slowly became an important part of the world economic system. The sheer size of Indian population made it very special to the investors abroad and the multinational traders. Through the economic reforms, the Indian government liberalized its import strategies, enabling more multinational products to enter the Indian market. Alongside, the state was asked to cut down subsidies and welfarism in a given way so as to make governance economically more viable. 

In the context of communication revolution, which goes hand in hand with privatization, liberalization and globalization, the media has responded in conformity with this trend by being capital-intensive. To maintain its own interests, as media itself is a commercial venture in character, it acts more vehemently as the mechanism of capitalism in order to promote ‘consumerism’. This trend, indeed, is a continuous process from the very beginning of independent period, but has strengthened since 1980s. Unsurprisingly, under the torrential spate of ‘globalization’, various media institutions require plenty of men and women journalists who are able to write anything, merely to fulfill the aim of increasing circulation.

In press, the media scenario in this phase has witnessed the biggest wave of women entering into journalism. The very diluted gender discrimination in terms of ‘recruitment’ or ‘entrance’ has opened a smooth way for aspiring women to join this profession. The situation in journalistic front is coincidental with other professions, as there is wide spread acceptance of women participating in many kinds of work in most parts of the country. The study of women and media finds that in contrast to their precedence, women journalists of this phase cover almost all beats, be it politics, economics, foreign affairs, art, culture, entertainment, crimes, sport, etc. They work on par with the male counterparts as full time staffs, freelancers and columnists. Besides this phase evidences a number of senior women journalists who are the editors. Major daily newspapers claim that, at least one executive editor, joint editor, a few resident editors, several senior editors and deputy editors, a handful of political editors and financial business editors, many assistant editors, a large number of senior and special
correspondents, a few news editors and deputy news editors, as well as a number of chief sub-editors are women. In addition, there are also several female foreign correspondents, a few women photographers, a couple of women cartoonists. The similar situation also occurs with the magazines. Apart from seeing women editors of women’s film and society magazines, women even make more progress in men’s magazines. According to study, at least 2 women, Anjali Mathu and Amrita Shah, could become the editors in the male magazines.

The following explanation however can be referred only to the broad picture of journalism in general. In reality, the degree of women joining journalism is varied to several factors determining the character of each media. The criteria to measure the status of women in media therefore, has to take variables like the form of media, language and region etc. into account. Otherwise the picture projected by the researcher will be obscure, vague and lose its essential sense.

According to the data collection between the years 2000 to 2003, it was observed that, the status of women in English press especially in major cities like Mumbai, Pune, New Delhi, Kolkatta and Chennai, had been improved quantitatively and qualitatively. In some newspapers, for example in ‘The Times of India’ (Mumbai and Pune), ‘The Indian Express’ (Pune and Chennai), ‘The Observer’ (Mumbai), ‘The Hindu’ (Chennai and New Delhi), ‘The Hindustan Times’ (New Delhi), etc. the number of women journalists was almost equal to the male counterparts. Several women editors and journalists in all these major cities accepted that the number of women entering into journalism, especially after 1990, had increased tremendously. Most of them were just out of college or were very young. They worked on duty round the clock and were neither excluded from the night shift. The reason attributed to this new event rests on the fact that some women journalists of this phase do not hesitate to step into ‘hard news’ coverage like politics, economics, foreign affairs, etc. which normally has been labelled as the male domain. Besides, a few women even opt to work in crime, dacoity, sport, etc. coverage, while the coverage of art, culture, entertainment, women, human rights, environment, etc. issues still remain their dominant areas. In ‘Statesman’ (Kolkatta), ‘The Hindu’ (Chennai and New Delhi) and ‘The Hindustan Times’ (New Delhi), the situation of women journalists was not far different from ‘The Times of India’, ‘The Indian Express’ and ‘The Observer’
in Mumbai and Pune. But in some newspapers like ‘Mid Day’ (Pune) and ‘The Telegraph’ (Kolkata) the number of women journalists was still low and they were marginalized from the ‘hard news’ beats. Concerning this problem, women journalists in ‘The Telegraph’ further explained that beyond the marginalization of women journalists from ‘hard news’ coverage, what really disturbed them in the process of working was the staunch opposition of editors they faced when women journalists showed their keen interest towards serious women’s issues. They said, “The editor would prefer to cater ‘soft’ articles on fashion, recipes or gossiping rather than women’s rights. For them what is sold is soft subjects, not serious ones”. However, the most advance condition for women journalists according to the opinion of women journalists themselves is in Delhi. Delhi being the capital of India, it exposes itself to international level more than any state of India, this results in the tremendous number of women entering into journalism.

In contrast to the English press, the vernacular press of the millennium has kept slow pace in the development of women in journalism. In Maharashtra, the Marathi newspaper, ‘Maharashtra Times’ and ‘Loksatta’ in Mumbai, in spite of having a policy recruiting women journalists into the work front from at least 2 decades, the status of women journalists still remain poor quantitatively and qualitatively. According to the interviews of female respondents in regional language press, they accepted the fact that women were less favourable than men. In this regard, apart from having very few number of women working in journalism, most of women journalists had to confine their responsibility only within desk-work and ‘soft news’ beats like culture, art, children, entertainment, women’s issues, etc. Only a few of them were assigned by the male editor to cover ‘hard news’ beats. The retarded attitude towards women happened in the same way with ‘Kesari’, ‘Sakal’, ‘Lokmat’ and other newspapers based in Pune. ‘Kesari’ and ‘Sakal’, despite being the pioneer newspapers contributing to women’s issues since pre-independent period, the position of women in these newspapers today too has undergone little change. The policy of over protection to women, as they are defined as the ‘weaker sex’, is usually applied to prevent women working in the night shift. Coincidentally, in Calcutta, though being the birth place of social reform and nationalist movement, the state of women journalists today seems to be even more deteriorated than Maharashtra. In ‘Bengali’ newspapers like ‘Bradman’, ‘Pratidin’, and ‘Ananda Bazar’, study found very
few women partaking the role of journalists and most of them were not permitted to cope with politics, economics, foreign affairs, etc. Neither did they deal with the night shift. In short, they mostly engaged with deskwork or soft news beats. In Madras, the situation of women in journalism was even worse, because until the day research was conducted, certain newspapers like ‘Malai Marusu’ and ‘Daily Thanti’ did not employ women working full time at all. The rest of the newspapers like ‘Dina Mani’, ‘Dina Malar’ and ‘Malai Marasu’, the condition of women seemed to be slightly better, but the number of them as compared to the male counterparts was still very low and they had been given responsibility only in desk-work and soft news reporting. The predicament state of women in journalism simultaneously occurs with women journalists in Delhi, the capital of India. Over there, some newspapers, for example ‘Punjab Kesari’, did not have even a single female journalist, though one or two women had been employed as clerical staffs. Further, other newspapers like ‘Navbharat Times’, ‘Dainik Jagran’ ‘Amarujala’, ‘Shah Times’, etc. had very few numbers of women journalists and almost all of them were dealing with feature and other soft news beats. Interestingly, when asking women journalists in the above mentioned vernacular newspapers whether they are satisfied with the treatment meted out to them by their male counterparts, most of them replied in an affirmative way. This particular response was not shared to the same degree as those in the English newspapers. In the English newspapers, more number of women journalists, showed an extreme awareness of gender discrimination in their newspaper organizations.

As there are hundreds of women journalists in the present time it would be next to impossible to enumerate their names in the description. Nonetheless, one must not forget that most of women journalists in today’s scenario take journalism with the idea of ‘Professionalism’, which view journalism as being objective rather than ‘idealism’. Among them very few pursue the ‘feminist’, ‘Marxist’ or ‘socialist’ ideology. The notion of journalists as activists carried by women journalists during the years 1975 - 1985 seems no longer to exist. A few women journalists in the English newspapers comment that in today’s media scenario if the young women journalists are not assigned to cover politics, economic, foreign affairs, etc. they have to write on ‘consumerist’ issues, which normally is considered as a part of ‘Women’s page’ or ‘Sunday edition’. The serious women’s issues like family planning, women’s rights, women demonstration, crime
against women in any form, etc. hardly attract the interest of the editors. In this regard, some women journalists voice that these issues have become boring for the paper to carry them and thus they are reduced to fillers. One of them expressed, “Who cares what I write? You can not have any idea of changing the set up or basically the same issue are being addressed........ Today it may be Sarla, tomorrow somebody else and so on.... Or Sati does not have new value..... These are routine customs which keep happening or to hear that every second – third women gets raped is no point because people already know it”.

The absence of journalists, who at times are activists, or what is termed as ‘Development Journalism’ in press today, stems from the fact that in the present time women and social movement lose potentiality in attracting the attention of public. This circumstance leads the press particularly the newspapers to treat women and social issues as routine events. This evidences in the reduction of investigative serious women and social issues, which once in 1975-1985 used to be leading articles, into a short form of reporting hidden in a small column. In women magazines, occasionally women’s issues get coverage only because feminism is viewed as fashion, otherwise they usually focus on the issues of ‘cookery and beauty’. If we look at ‘Femina’ in comparison with ‘Women’s Era’ today, the only difference among them is, the former targets the modern and working women, whose mind seems to be occupied with the idea of being sexy and having sophisticated looks, while the latter choose to reach out the conservative housewives who enjoy luxurious affairs in the traditional manner. Thus it is not an over statement to state that from 1990 onwards, under the torrential spate of privatization, liberalization and globalization, ‘feminism’ is subdued to ‘consumerism’. The consumerism issues not only replace the feminism issues but, at the same time are blatantly promoted by the press. The study on women and media in India points out that under this circumstance women have suddenly become ‘hot’ copy. They are saleable and are welcome with open arms by advertisers and sponsors because they today are the hottest consumers going. They buy lipstick along with wheat, rice, bread and butter. Sometimes, they go and buy themselves a consumer durable like a refrigerator or even an investible durable like a computer or word processor. They buy lengths of floor-covering and carpets, and artificial bonsai to be kept in the living room. So advertisers and
sponsors of consumer products are happy to welcome women as protagonist in all forms of the media whether be it press, radio, TV, cinema, etc. " It is apparent that the ‘consumerism’ trend did not occur abruptly after 1990, but is more a continuous process resulting from the past. As Asha Ramesh insisted that in the early 1980s, though Femina tried to deal with social issues concerning women, but it still was not sufficient, since beauty culture, fashion, traditional values and such still were the major foci of the magazine. Even in ‘Eves Weekly’ the main accent was on beauty and fashion. Take for example there was an issue which had on its cover printed “Still time to enter Miss India and Miss Young India contest”. So the message was clear: “young ladies, do all you can to become a beauty, since apparently it is the ultimate in woman’s life”.

The gradual change on the role of women journalists in press during the time of media revolution or, in another words consumerism era, did not originate from a vacuum. The reason behind this very fact lies on the basis that the press by character is commercially based as most major newspapers and magazines are owned by a handful of business houses. The primary goal of commercial press, according to Al Hester is to make money for the owner. So frequently the choice of news stories and displays of the news are based upon what will increase the street sales of paper. The reporter and editor are at the mercy of management, which decides the ‘News hole’ (what is left over after the advertisements are laid out). If the paper does not turn a good profit, it will go out of business or be sold to someone else. Concerning the collaboration between consumerism and women in media, Ajay Kumar expresses the idea that on one side of the coin the women of the consumerist era is idealized neither as an enlighten mother nor as a self-fulfilled working person. On the other side, a consumerist society puts the women on the pedestal as the glamourized sex object, alone her supreme purpose becomes providing titillation to the male dominant world. Realizing from the above statements it is easy for one to understand why women are being viewed only as potential consumers and sex creatures in the media, even when the government declared the goal of Eighth Five Year Plan (1992-1997) for the empowerment of women. This must be a reason as to why women journalists of today are compelled to deal with consumerism.
The Role and Problems of Women Journalists in Contemporary India

Despite the fact that journalism as a profession has been taken up by Indian women since the early years of independent India, the studies on the role and problems of contemporary women journalists, especially in press, is still scanty and dearth. Most of the available ones in media studies if not irrelevant provide insufficient information and data. However, there are a few works, which enable to throw a light and provide an insight on the concerning subject. These studies, in spite of being incomplete, however are springing up new ideas, to a considerable extent.

The general problems of women journalists in independent India was revealed by B. K. Bal. In his essay ‘women in unusual profession’, he pointed out that, in the mid 1980s though a number of educated women were working outside or employed, journalism, which was termed as reporters, copy readers, editorial writers, sub-editors, editors, cartoonists, photographers, etc., in newspapers, magazines, news agencies, press information bureau, radio, periodical publication, etc., was still viewed as an ‘unusual profession’ for women. According to him, there were a few women reporters in the newspapers, but seemed to be more in the magazines. These women journalists contributed writings mainly in children and women’s page including feature columns on fashion, cookery, beauty-culture, child-care, home making, art, social events and human interest. He further stated that among women journalists, those who were fond of desk work and writing would opt to work as sub-editors. In this respect, they had to edit, correct, rewrite, illustrate, give title headlines, captions, etc. to the magazines or publication. However, since great amount of prejudices and unfavourable social attitude towards girls working away from homes prevailed in Indian society during those days, a few women journalist who broke into this new avenue and were already working in journalism had to fight the socio-economic battles bravely. But in doing so, they had also lighted new paths and opened avenues for the future generations.

Another study titled On New Directions: Opening in Mass Media of Communication conducted by YWCA around 1970s, also elucidated the problems faced by women journalists. It indicated that despite Indian communication particularly the press had long impressive history, it led to few opening for women in journalism. Consequently, press journalism was still a predominantly male domain. The study of
YWCA also showed that though the newspapers had evolved arrangement for formal, it continued associating with women freelance journalists. A scope for women to make regular contribution in the newspapers confined only within film critics, music critics, art critics, fashion critics, book reviewers, home making, interior decoration, kennel notes, gardening and other human interest stories. Amita Malik, Santha Rangachary, Padmini Sen Gupta, Kamal Chopra, Rammi Chabbra, Promila Kalhan, Rita Thappar, Kavita Sarcar and Razia Ismail were the good examples of well-known feature writers in the English press. To be precise, there was a prevailing view that women made better features than men.106

In reference to the status of women in press organizations, the same study asserted that since the emergence of women in journalism was not more than four decades, their status was rather poor. A survey conducted by Chandrakala Hate on career choice insisted on the dissatisfaction of women journalists in Maharashtra. They complained that in this line they occupied only subordinate positions and few or no avenues for promotion existed for them. The poor condition of women journalists in this particular period was obviously shown in the low number of women in journalism. That was in 1968, out of 2562 working journalists, only 16 were women. The following year, this number increased to 29 out of 2809 working journalists. In 1970, figures were not available, but a rough calculation would put the number of women journalists (at staffs) at around 40 in the entire country. Interestingly among these women, a very large number of them were occupied in writing for women and children’s magazines or for the women’s sections of various journals and newspapers. However, in certain sub-fields of journalism, women had done better. As the convention of the Indian Association of Industrial Editors held in Delhi, revealed that every sixth participant was a woman. And more than 25 percent of the 250 editors who were members of the association were women. In addition, the President of the Association was Mrs. Jane Swamy, who was regarded as an authority on industrial editing.107

The reason as to why there was less number of working women in journalism according to the study of YWCA was the reluctant attitude of men in Indian journalism to admit women to their corps. Another discouraging factor was the tendency on the part of male editors of newspapers to assign the women reporter into the women’s and children
Further, women journalists had a feeling that the bustling and jostling world of news happenings was not kind to their physical frail. Moreover, late night duty, long hours, arduous travel, lack of privacy and feminine conveniences in place of work or in the ‘beat’ areas, and hazards of covering events involving violence, rioting or civil disorder made it tough and discouraging for women.

The role and problems of women journalists was discussed analytically by Rama Jha, in her article ‘Women in Print Media: Initiating New Perspectives’, published in 1992, assured that the problems of women journalists apparently involved both quantitative and qualitative aspects. According to her, though there were 29,144 newspapers at the end of 1989, as compared to 18,140 in 1980 in the country, when we look at them from the angle of women’s representation in the structure of main stream media (newspapers), it was indeed marginalized. The number of women altogether as work force in the newspapers was hardly 2% of the total number of persons employed. And when considering the status of women journalists she found that the shift of women’s development news from women’s page to the front page was possible only when the newspapers management agreed to make a full scale commitment to hiring and promoting women.

Taking the role played by women in print media into account she argued it was necessary to investigate the allied question whether women were employed at the decision making position in the newspaper in India. From this point of view she noticed it was only recently that Ms. Dina Vakil, the only one in India, who had occupied the No.1 position of an editor of ‘The Sunday Observer’. Even as yet, she claimed, India did not have any women of the rank of an editor. It was not, until in 1992, that India had many women assistant editors in dailies.

The cause of deprivation of women from decision making position in the mainstream newspapers according to Dr. Rama Jha’s idea, derived from the very hierarchical and male bias in nature in the newspaper organizations. In general, women often encountered difficulties when dealing with men bosses and colleagues. She concluded the problems faced by women journalists did not stem only from the different perception within the profession, but also rooted in the male chauvinistic attitude. This was clearly shown in the comment of male bosses and colleagues in media organizations.
As they often told women journalists that “Women will remain women, women can never change, what issues could women have, etc”. 111

Despite the studies on the role and problems of women journalists by Indian Academy might proved to be inadequate, the international academy like Temple University, School of Communications and Theatre, Philadelphia Pennsylvania USA, showed interest in the concerning subject. The study on ‘Women and Mass Communication, The Asian literature’ by John A Lent in 1985 with reference to an article written by James Carty indicated that, in India, the percentage of women in the media work place was very low. The figures were only 1% for print. Carty attributed these low figures to the ‘persisting traditions of the masculine oriented cultures’ and protective legislation to keep ‘delicate women’ from nighttime or overtaxing physical assignments. The study simultaneously referred to the work of Nathan, who described the Indian women journalist’s situation. Nathan pointed out that no woman journalist acquired the power, which Annie Besant had as editor in the early 20th century. In the 1970s, women editors were usually assigned to women’s journals, film periodicals or children’s papers. In other instance women claimed they were examples of tokenism. 112

The study on ‘Women and the media in South Asia’ conducted by a group of scholar, Sima Sharma, Irwin Weekrakody, Narendra R. Panday and Sharif A. Mujahid published in 1987 on periodical called ‘Media Asia’ also attracted the public attention in the international level. They found that though the number of women enrolment in course since 1960 had increased consistently. As of 1962, there were 4 women students in the journalism departments of Nagpur University, in a class of 16. In 1964, in the Times of India’s apprenticeship scheme for journalists, there were 3 women among the 10 entrants. Some 20 years later, in 1985, in a class, of the Times Research Foundation Institute’s School of Social Journalism had 13 girls and 13 boys. 113 Nevertheless, female student in journalism still encountered difficulties due to the training programs located only in the larger cities, which hardly provided convenient, inexpensive and safe accommodation. Thus, the situation eliminated the girls from outside city automatically. 114

The problems of women journalists in both quantitative and qualitative aspects was simultaneously conducted by women and media group. They discovered that while there were 8,161 publication in India in 1965, and 20,000 publications in 1987, the
participation of women in this sector however had remained marginal at a mere 2%. Notably, a number of them who had risen in the profession chose to confine themselves to women’s issues and the relate ‘soft’ areas of journalism such as environment, children, human rights, health and basic needs, etc. Alongside, around the year survey was conducted there were quite a few women journalists successful in their career. This was due to the fact that the factor determining their success depended upon their ability to better men’s performance on strictly male terms. The women journalists generally were aware of this problem, but found difficulties to cast it out. In their opinion, the belief that women cannot work at late night, women have domestic burden, women tend to work only at their job, but have little time for union activities, women are less liable to push for promotion and are more pliable to their ideologies etc., were the main barrier hindering the recruitment and advancement of women in this profession. As a result, no woman had yet taken charge of a national daily newspaper or news magazine, though the Sunday magazine section of several dailies were being run by them.  

The problem of women journalists in general was not restricted only within the dimensions that these aforementioned studies enveloped. In actual fact, some studies even went further to scrutinize in the area of regional or vernacular media. Referring the study on the situation of women journalists in Kerela conducted by Gita Aravamudan of Trivendrum, the study showed that around 1987, though Kerala was known to be the state with the highest percentage of female literacy, the main stream press like newspapers continued resistance to employing women journalists. ‘Malayala Manorama’, the largest circulated daily of Kerela with a circulation of over 6.5 lakhs, did not employ women. The handful of women journalists who worked in the Malayalam press held desk job or worked for women’s magazines. Indeed the Press commission after a study of women in South India, concluded that 99% of the newspapers discriminated against women, who form a bare 3% of the people in the profession although four times their number were trained professionally.

Another study highlighting the problems of women journalists in vernacular media can be alluded to Sonal Shukla, columnist and freelance writer, Bombay. She rendered a study on the role of women journalists in Gujarathi Mainstream Media focusing on the Gujarati newspapers and magazines. According to her, Gujarati
newspapers and newsmagazines gave very low priority to women’s issues. Analyzing from her statement, we can surely assume that there were few women journalists working in Gujarathi papers, as women journalists in vernacular press in those days were in charge only with news related to women. Sonal Shukla claimed that the women’s issues came up for editorial comments only when major campaigns were being conducted by women’s groups or when a major event caused national level political reactions, as it had happened at the time of Shahbano case or Rup Kanwar’s Sati. Regular features like her story, review of books concerning women and articles on development issues, which could also focus specifically on status of women and which had space in several English language newspapers and news magazines were not yet introduced by their Gujarathi counterparts. Further, development journalism was not even on newspaper agenda’s. It was not yet considered as a concern, a career choice or even a fashion by Gujarathi journalists. Interestingly, despite the existence of an institute for development communications in Ahmedabad at least ten years, only two of its female students had opted for a career in journalism.¹¹⁷

The above mentioned studies both from India and foreign sources in regard to the obstacles faced by women journalists in press since the early years of independent India until late 1980s was assured by the personal experience of women journalists, who shared the informal discussion held by The Centre of Women’s Development Studies in 1985. The intention of the discussion was to evaluate the contribution of media during the decade of women vis-à-vis status of women. In the course of discussion, the group also went on to discuss the role of media in depicting the reality about women’s life.¹¹⁸

The first woman journalist, who gave an insight to the concerned subject, was Rami Chhabra. Looking back at the past personal experience since 1957, she felt the newspaper organizations had been continuously hostile to women.

The bitter experience she got from the newspapers began from the first day she stepped into journalism in 1957. According to her, to be accepted as a staff of the newspaper organization, she had to struggle hard. She explained that despite the newspaper she applied for used to publish her articles with appreciation, it refused to recruit her as a regular apprentice only because she is a woman.
Rami Chhabra faced another discrimination when she was in charge of women's column. Her editor frequently found her column too serious. He suggested her to concentrate more on issues relating to fashion, beauty, consumer interests, etc. The situation became worse when the editor did not realize that the conference on women conducted by UN in 1975 deserved Front Page. He instead, just highlighted Women's Lib in the women's page.119

Following Rami Chhabra in the discussion was Neera Chaudhary, a prominent journalist who won a number of awards. Talking about the handicap encountered by women journalists in the early years, she confessed that even around late 1960s the newspaper she belonged to was still reluctant to take on women. The reason claimed by the editor according to Chaudhary was very stereotyped. He was scared that women would leave the work after marriage, wasting all the investment made in training them. The editor, therefore, was of the view that the newspaper should take an undertaking from women who would not leave the job for a number of years. Chaudhary, however felt that all editors were not the same. Some of them were very keen to take on women as they found women to be hard working journalists.

The challenging situation experienced by Chaudhary proved to be incredibly sexist. She explained that once she was told at 4 p.m. to file a story on the Muslim reaction to a landmark Supreme Court judgement. She thought it was very unfair because she had already an evening engagement. So she had to locate the concerned people. Though she could manage this problem, she then realized about double standards in the newspaper organization. As a woman, she could not mention about this particular problem to the editor. Otherwise he would say, “If you can't do, a man will do it”.

In spite of having such barrier, Chaudhary, saw the change in media scenario. She said, though previously journalism was considered only a waiting room of marriage for the young educated women. In course of time, there was certain change, as women had become more serious in the profession.120

Mrinal Pande, the editor of ‘Vama’ a leading Hindi magazine, who had established a prominent niche for herself and women in general in the Hindi magazine world too, shared her experience in this discussion. She pointed out on the sexual division of labour employed by the Hindi newspapers. According to Pande, initially
women’s responsibility was confined only within film, children’s stories, pictures of birds and the like. As time go by, though women began to get more coverage, the Hindi newspapers still witnessed women in stereotype job.

The content of women’s page carried by the Hindi newspapers, in view of Pande, was also stereotyped. She felt the women’s page aimed to cater entertainment and leisure to housewives rather than realized its obligation to serious women’s issues. The women’s page, in fact, functioned as a means to increase the newspaper’s circulation, not to raise feminist awareness among women.

The change over decade however, came within her own work. She noticed that a column in ‘Manorama’, the Hindi magazine, which she often took up serious issues, made certain impact on women readers. In some families, husband and wife even started having arguments about her column.

The problem of women journalists in countering patriarchal attitude in commercial press was experienced individually by Vimala Patil the editor of a women’s magazine at a crucial time in the history of the women’s movement. In her book called ‘My Times; memoirs’ she demonstrated how her male colleagues in The Times of India group held bias against women in the work place and felt resentment as well as jealousy when ‘Femina’ became high profile and popular among targeted readers. According to Vimala’s experience, the male colleagues in the Times of India tended to believe that women were the second class citizens. Therefore during the 35 years of its existence, The Times never gave Femina the place it deserved, though it made profit to the company. The result was that, however well Femina did in earning money or establishing its name, the company gave it no sustenance or the promotion. Until the early 1990s the staff of Femina was one of the poorest paid in the company.

The sexist attitude, which women journalists in The Times of India received from the management was evident not only within Femina, but also included ‘Filmfare’. Like, women journalists in ‘Femina’, women journalists in Filmfare were last on the list of priorities, although it made highest profit for the company.

The source of gender discrimination in The Times of India, from Vimala’s point of view, derived from the jealousy of male colleagues. In this account, Vimala claimed that the managers or owners of The Times of India were no exception. She explained that
when she became famous, some of them tried to prevent her from fronting and high profile. Quotes from Vimala’s memoirs clearly revealed her surprise and indignation.

“I dare say, had I chosen law or medicine or any other professions, I would have done equally well. So what was this hoo-ha about “fronting”? Since Sameer Jain himself never said such things, were the jealous words, actions and obstructions, which prominent journalists faced the doing of executives who had risen from being trainees or clerks to managers and directors? I shall never know but while I was at the Times of India, this jealousy bagged down the work of many journalists like me. But more about this later.”

Analyzing the problems of women journalists in details can be clearly seen in the study titled ‘The hurdle race: Women Journalists’ Struggle Against Cultural Biases’ conducted by Rama Jha. Her study based on in-depth interview of women journalists of 1970s in 4 metropolitan cities Bombay, Delhi, Calcutta, and Madras. It aimed to answer two question whether women feel directly or indirectly discriminated in profession and whether they think that in facing the hazards of hard professional work in print media, men are generally more suited than women.

To attain the objective of study, the questions she posed ranged from the general problem pertaining to the attitude of male colleagues and news sources in perceiving the work done by women journalists to the specific problem caused by being married women in Indian society. As many correspondents were asked and there were different shades of answers, the thesis choose to present only those details, which have relevance with the concerned subject.

Usha Rai of The Times of India held the view that women journalists were not taken seriously. She referred to one particular incident when the editor became angry with her after she refused to cover the opening of some Emporium on Sunday, but demanded all other assignments for that day. As a result she had been threatened by him continuously. In an occasion, he challenged her to cover rape stories in Muzzaffarnagar. When she accepted, he then ended up with a fight. The fight continued until the time of her pregnancy as she was told to report riot stories even during her eight months of pregnancy. In this respect, Usha felt that the male journalists either challenge women or over protect them.
Usha lamented that men doubted women’s abilities. They preferred women journalists to remain in their respective departments. One editor even told her that journalism had ‘no place for women’. Usha experienced what he told her particularly when she approached a senior level position as a special correspondent. She felt she was being kept back from the editor’s post.

Nandini Mehta from the Indian Express also was taken less seriously. She remarked that, during her work in the ‘The Statesman’ she was kept waiting by her source for 10 minutes. By this, she felt the news source did not take her seriously as compared to male reporters. However, she defended women journalists as working harder than the male counterparts. She argued because women journalists had to take burden at home both as wives and mothers, so they utilized their time in office better than men. The men, on the contrary, sat and chatted or visited the press club. Mehta concluded that as far as discrimination was concerned, woman had to prove her ability through double work.

Mrinal Pande, editor of ‘Sapthahik Hindustan’, a Hindi weekly of the Hindustan Times Group went through similar discrimination. She observed that when she started ‘Varna’, the male colleagues had misgiving and male derogatory remarks. She however, encountered this problem only in the beginning of the profession. After her male colleagues realized that she worked very professionally, the bias eventually ceased. She clarified that when women acquired a reputation of being serious and when the magazine enjoyed a degree of respect in the market, it dispersed any misgiving about women as journalists.

Contrarily, Neeraja Chaudhary of the Indian Express believed that journalists especially women had to cover politics, defence or finance in order to advance in the profession. She felt that, gender discrimination somewhat related to ‘news values’. Neeraja also compared the attitude between the editors of Statesman, Mr. Irani and Kuldeep Nayar. She pointed out that while Nayar preferred not to take women, claiming that they would leave the job after marriage, Mr. Irani welcomed women as he considered women are hardworking and conscientious. However, when asked about the attitude of male colleagues towards her in general, she replied that when she decided to marry, they
remarked that she would not be interested in work any longer. To prove herself, she then had to do extra work.  

One notable woman journalist was Talveen Singh. Unlike other women journalists of the 1970s, she did not ask for special favours and accepted to work late night. However, while most women journalists in her time preferred soft issues like culture or cinema, she was interested in politics. She remarked that, as serious issues were not considered women’s domain, her story on the ban of Coca-Cola was placed on the third page, instead of Front page. Singh further explained that the male journalists discriminated against women because they felt women are breaking into their territory.  

Rasheeda Bhagat of The Indian Express, Madras, also supported the argument that more discrimination, difficulties and challenges come from within the media organizations than from outside. In her case, she confessed that the male journalists did not easily accept her as a reporter, though a woman can be easily accepted as a sub-editor.  

Similarly Malvika Singh of the Business Indian Group believed that women do not have easy time in press. She commented that the print media has been the bastion of men. It still is because women can be editors only in the magazine section. There is no woman editor at the helm of political or economic magazine.  

Further, Anita Pratap of Time Magazine expressed that women should be as aggressive in work as men. What disturbed her was the ‘paternalism’ she had received or witnessed in the beginning.  

Contrast to these examples was Smita Gupta of ‘Independent’. Smita had been an activist and received the post of sub-editor because she looked like an academic type. Surprisingly, despite working harder to prove herself, she felt there was no real discrimination in her time.  

Finally, we come to Nirmala Lakshman (M.D. of The Hindu), who edited the Sunday Magazine. Nirmala remarked that due to her position in the newspaper, she had received discrimination more subtly. More obviously was the stereotype about women because she was already a mother at that time.  

The gender discrimination existing in journalism was assured by the view of male editors and journalists. Through the interviews, they expressed the opinion that women
are not welcomed in the newspaper organizations because they have a tendency to devote more time to the family’s responsibility than the newspaper’s work. Some male editors commented that women journalists often take the advantage of the best part of being a woman. They demand sympathy from the male editors and colleagues, claiming the heavy burden associating with the role of being a mother and a housewife. To put succinctly, the male journalists feel that very few women journalists can work efficiently in comparison to the male counterparts. Further, they suspect female’s achievements in the profession. According to them, women journalists cannot go far, unless they use their feminine tricks for the progress of her career.  

In addition to the following studies as described above, Shoma A. Chatterjee tried to examine other aspects of gender discrimination persisting in press media. Her question ‘Women in Media: Are women for Sunday only’, not only showed how patriarchy was deeply rooted in the media institutions, but it also unfolded the predominant ideology, which played a crucial role in determining the content of media. In the question of ‘Women in Media: Are women for Sunday only?’ She found that the daily English newspapers or even any of the major Indian language papers on week-days hardly had articles, or columns, or features allotted for women. But on Sunday or on weekends, most papers faithfully had a place reserved for women. She raised the questions: “Are women a Sunday sex? Do women cease to exist on other days of the week? Or do women cease to be women on other days of the week?” To quote her: “There is a column on art once a week, a column or two on music, dance, theatre, a page for sports, but none for and on women….women are used more for news having stunt value, for juicy news, for sex based and sex centric news, sometimes veiled under the guise of sympathy...”

Shoma A. Chatterjee gave evidence to prove her assumption ‘Women are for Sunday only’ by listing the name of women journalists, who dealt with women’s issues in Sunday paper. Her observation, though based only on Bombay, enable us to draw a broad picture of the condition of women journalists in other metropolitan cities at the same period.

In ‘Times of India’, Chatterjee, claimed that it had a quota for women on Sundays only. Anee Jung and the later addition, Reeta Dutta – Gupta involved in this work. During the weekdays of The Times of India, one could see a column on women achievers
but it did not last. In ‘Maharashtra Times’, the paper was not concerned with women at all, whether during the week or even on Sundays.\textsuperscript{136}

In ‘Indian Express’, the paper did not give much space to women in the ‘Express Magazine’, the Sunday supplement of the paper. However, some oriented subjects were dealt with regularly and very objectively by Vimal Balsubramaniam and Padma Prakash who specialized in medical and health aspects of women in urban and rural areas, and sometimes, by Nalini Singh. Many books reviewed in Express Magazine were also titled towards women or were often authored by women. But the question, according to Chatterjee is, was this possible because the editor herself is a woman who was really concerned about what was happening to her own sex?

In ‘Sunday Observer’ it did not have anything specially allotted to women. But there were many features, new stories, interviews of women and articles by women, which could be incidental to the story and not designed to favour the sex.

In ‘Loksatta’ (Marathi language), it did not have much to do with women even on Sunday and some women readers lamented this short coming despite its very dynamic editor Madhav Gadkari. In ‘Pravasi’ (Gujarati language), it had a regular weekly column every Monday penned by Sonal Shukla, a feminist activist, which had a wide readership, and other features on women on Sunday. The other well known Gujarathi paper ‘Mumbai Samachar’ also had space exclusively allotted to women and for women.\textsuperscript{137}

The afternoon papers of Bombay were broad based. The rival papers, ‘Mid Day’ and the ‘Afternoon Despatch and Courier’ both paid a lot of attention to women in relation to news, feature page, and column wise. The Free Press Bulletin (now defunct) was not to be left behind with a day given full page for, and on, women. The Evening News also had one before Pritish Nandy and company took over and stopped its publication.

The question that arise, from making women visible only in Sunday paper was, ‘Are women the reserved sex, then to be given separate space in the press?’ The answer given by Chatterjee was ‘no and never that’. She insisted that women need a platform to express themselves, not necessarily as authors but also as subjects, which not only other women but also all men should be knowledgeable about.\textsuperscript{138}
The problem of women journalists caused by the seclusion of women from the so-called ‘hard news’, as most of them were put in so-called ‘soft news’ and Sunday Edition, consequently resulted in the lack of opportunity for women to be promoted at the decision making position. Henceforth the selection of media’s coverage, like what to cover and how to cover, if not all, almost so depended upon the influence and determination of the male editors. Various media studies showed that it was the male editors, who wield the power imposing broad policy of news coverage ranging from ‘hard news’ like politics, economics, foreign affairs, defence, etc., to ‘soft news’ like women, children, social and human rights issues etc. Relating to this point Vibhuti Patel wrote, “working on women’s question is still treated as soft journalism. Many times, women journalists labour in working on a story get wiped off as it is treated as trivial or sentimental or lacking humour or entertainment, by their male bosses in the media hierarchy”.

The concerned problem subsequently affected the image of women portrayed by the media and the development of the content pertaining to women’s issues as well. According to Gallaghers quoted by John A. Lent, since the media considered women and their problems as having less newsworthiness. Women appeared in media as passive, dependent persons with few concerns of outside. To be precise, they were being portrayed only as domestic and romantic creatures, women therefore were manipulated as the target of advertising. Gallagher’s insight was consonant with Patel, she pointed out that as media baron were all males, whose value orientation generally hardly changed, they mostly were busy with covering hardcore news of politics war, diplomatic relations, riot, etc. This attitude inevitably compelled the women’s issues to be treated as ‘soft’ journalism.

Taking the stereotype image of Indian women portrayed by mass media into account, Ajay Kumar concluded that, the dominant stereotype images of women and girls portrayed through media were that of: (I) less competent human being (II) key to commercial success in the age of advertising (III) instrument for exploitation by men. To support this argument, Vimal Balasubrahmanyam stated that in India, established media not only had neglected women’s issues in coverage and comment, but also perpetuated sex-role stereotype and exploited women bodies sexually.
Regarding the same issue, Uma Shankar Jha, Arati Mehta and Latika Menon added that in The International Women’s Year 1975, there had been a unanimous agreement that the image of women projected by media consisted elements of discrimination against women throughout the world. However, in India, the situation of Indian Women’s imagery in Media was even more deplorable, because women were portrayed merely as self-sacrificing mother, housewife and confined in her stereotype image. The picture of good – bad – virgin and not virgin often gave the image of Indian women.\textsuperscript{143}

The negative image of women projected by mass media was also described by Chandralekha. According to her, in the workshop on the use of posters organized in Bombay 1980, under the theme ‘Women as consumers of anti-women media’, a women group called ‘Skill’ raised the critical questions to media. The questions asked in the workshop addressed several issues, such as why women read literature depicting them in unworthy images, subscribe to magazines, which depict women by type, and be advertised for more emphatically ‘men’s goods’, e.g. underwear, suiting or razor blades. More seriously, why do women participate in debasing activity?\textsuperscript{144}

In 1997, Raj Laxmi in her article ‘Women and the media’, analyzed that the portrayal of women in mass media was largely confined to advertisements and reports on physical molestation, mental abuse of women on some special event in a given field. To put it succinctly, she stated that, there were two popular images of women as portrayed in media that, “She is either a Miss World or a Miss Universe or the other extremes of a battered, bruised and brutalized image of women either as a rape victim or as a chattel servicing the endless needs of the extended Hindu joint family”. She further held the view that with few exceptions, the Frontline for instance, the Indian media did not even bat an eyelid on the ostensible business interests of the ‘Miss Beauty Pageant’ organizers.\textsuperscript{145}

The study on image of women portrayed by mass media did not consider women only as the individual, but also as the movement. In this respect, study conducted by Vibhuti Patel, indicated that despite most of the participants in the National Conference on perspective for women’s liberation movement in India during Dec 1986, felt that the English print media had projected a more favourable image of the women’s movement
compared to its regional language media, the participants still found the negative attitude of English print media towards women’s cause. The third edits of all national dailies like Times of India, Hindu and Hindustan Times demonstrated how the mass media made mockery of women’s issues.\textsuperscript{146}

The study on portrayal of women in mass media particularly with special reference to press, though have not been conducted as many as other forms of media like television, cinema, advertising, etc, the available ones hold credibility in throwing the light on the concerned subject. In the English newspapers, the study on Sunday edition of four English language dailies in 1975 by Dasgupta revealed that the articles that dealt with women were mainly serious. But there were two points, which needed special attention. Firstly, the limited range of themes, which did not reflect many of the economic and political reality in women’s lives and secondly the bias towards middle class women over those in the rural area.\textsuperscript{147}

In vernacular newspapers, around 1985, Pathak did a special analysis on the portrayal of women in vernacular language. He took Gujarathi and Ahmedabad dailies as examples and found out that the editors did not want to tackle women’s problems seriously in the women’s section. Further, the relevant current issues such as women’s empowerment or about interaction at work were absent. Moreover, the issues of rape were treated as merely spicy stories.\textsuperscript{148}

Sharing the same study on vernacular newspapers conducted by Pathak, around 1990s Sonal Shukla studied on women’s portrayal in Gujarathi media. The result of her study demonstrated the shocking absence of ‘Gandhian values’ in reporting about women. According to Shukla, since 1970s, a fair example of sensationalism about women in the media was found in ‘Jamnabhai Pravasi’, a nationalist paper started during British control in Bombay. Other journals also reported narrowly about women by tight lighting physical features. With the exception of Femina, in Gujarathi edition, which spoke of more important women’s issues, most mainstream Gurarathi journals avoided women’s problems and only occasionally reported a ‘sensational murder’ involving women in one way or another. Oddly, only the English language dailies or magazines featured books or articles on women’s status. Even more ridiculous is the fact that, though development journalism and communication started in Ahmedabad in 1990s, real
development journalism did not reach the agenda of state media. Among Gujarathi papers, only a few Bombay dailies included a feminist column in their pages.149

Similar to Gujarathi press, the study on Hindi periodicals over the past 30 years showed a decline in discussing women’s issues, except for traditional concerns such as food, fashion and beauty tips. In 3 national women’s magazines, women were put in a subordinate position; competitiveness and consumerism were dominant themes in women’s interest. They showed women at home, either unemployed or doing there own housework. The magazines simultaneously failed to reflect the political, professional, intellectual and artistic achievements of them. Most importantly the women’s magazines often portrayed women as consumers and obscenity.150

Focusing especially on the women’s magazines including the women’s page and the Sunday edition introduced by the newspapers, Sucharita S. Eashwar observed that as the magazines concentrated on fashion, cookery, tailoring and homemaking art, women were portrayed only as ornamental wives. A woman’s primary role in the magazines was to get married and look after the needs of her husband and children. Her own needs as a person were secondary and could be sacrificed if they came in the way of her primary function. In consonant with women’s magazines, Sunday edition in the newspapers usually had a column dedicated to childcare, cookery, beauty and household arts. Occasionally, an ‘outstanding’ woman, who had broken away from her pre-ordained role of wife and mother and made a career in academic, business or a profession, was interviewed.151

However, Sucharita S. Eashwar stated that when looking at the text from press coverage of women’s issues, she found a changing picture in the last few years. In the newspapers where normally women hardly were featured in the news items except for items reporting on rape and dowry death, in the past five years study had seen a big growth in both the space given to news about women, and the quality of the coverage on women. In this regard, many daily newspapers had started a women’s page or column, which included significant articles and features relevant to women in becoming aware of their exploitation and understanding their rightful roles in society; for example, the ‘Woman’ column in Indian Express and ‘Women in Society’ column in Deccan Herald. In women’s magazines, some changes also took place, the magazines occasionally
carried features discussing aspects of feminism. For instance, Femina had devoted a space for women’s issues like the portrayal of women in media. ¹⁵²

Despite an effort to change the image of women, the same scholar observed that most of the news still concentrated on rapes, dowry, harassment and death, and other atrocities, which women were shown merely as the passive victims and powerless ones. There was no attempt to dig deeper into the facts of the case, do any follow-up on the development of the police and court proceedings, or inform about the situation of the women concerned. Often, the reports on gruesome dowry death, rape etc. were carried mainly for sensationalization. There was little analysis of the underlying causes. ¹⁵³

In short, Sucharita E. Eashwar felt that any news other than such atrocities was often given a light hearted or negative slant – whether it be the statement in the headline or copy, or in the facts highlighted, or in the choice of words used. For example, when Times of India reported that a woman pickpocket was caught red-handed by a woman, they chose to headline the news item: ‘Woman is woman’s worst enemy’. Many newspapers often used such euphemisms and archaic phraseology as ‘eves’, ‘weaker sex’, ‘fairer sex’, etc. to refer to women, thereby indirectly emphasizing women’s inequality to men. ¹⁵⁴

Considering only the portrayal of women in women’s journals, Asha Ramesh was of the opinion that women’s journal had been the providers of ignorance, non-information, unreal cultural values on one hand. On the other hand, it was positively harmful to the development of woman as a conscious individual and of the society around her. This view of Asha Ramesh was drawn from her observation when she took up the dozen of women’s magazines that were exhibited on the stalls. According to her all of them were made up of a standard formula of fashion, embroidery, knitting column, astrology, advertisement, interviews with women who have done little to make women proud, news of beauty contests and housewives associations, weepy stories, cookery, sick comics, etc., which made women the butt of humour, ¹⁵⁵

Asha Ramesh continuously observed that the news and features section gave one the impression that India was a land of plenty and that its women were pampered, if subordinate citizens. The cover page always displayed a pretty woman who could compare well with any ‘Playboy’ cover girl in sultry looks and the minimality of clothes.
‘Sarita’, the Hindi magazine, was the worst offender in this regard. For a women’s magazine, the women on its cover did always, for some undeniable reason, exposed substantial part of their bust and arms. 156

The news in the magazines, according to Asha Ramesh, was always about organizations or get-together of women, most, though not all of them, were either wife of top industrialists or of top-notch executives. It was never for the poor Indian housewives. Lion Ladies Clubs, Rotarian Clubs, Service Officers wives get-togethers, inaugurations of boutiques, selections of ‘Navy Queen’ and ‘Teen Princesses’ were the content of the news. The interviews and features on women usually featured wives of Industrialists who explained in great details how they spent their leisure. Stories were about unrequited and requited love. Cookery column featured dishes anyone of which could cost the average Indian a week’s salary. The comics showed women to be bird-brained beings that were dragged on a man’s lifestyle, nitwits whose main aim in life was to dip into their husband’s pockets for dresses and sitting at the hairdressers. While the advertisement blatantly emphasized on the role of women as a mother-wife-friend as well as bed mate. In brief, the women’s magazines portrayed women either as sexy creatures or traditional women, who enjoyed consumerism catered by the women’s magazines. Their content mostly reflected the life style of upper class, but had little to do with the ordinary women and women of the poor. To draw the broad picture Asha Ramesh gave example of ‘Femina’, which continuously carried columns on fanciful food, fashion clothing galore, aristocratic interiors and interviews of upper class women like politicians. However, she acknowledged that ‘Femina’ did try to deal with social issues concerning women. But it still was not sufficient since beauty culture, fashion, traditional values and such were the major priority of the magazine. 157

Secluding women from the decision making process not only led to the misportrayal of women in the newspapers and magazines, but also spontaneously resulted in the poor coverage of women’s movement in the contemporary time. Feminists believed that though the press had been sympathetic towards women’s issues especially in the early 1980s, the quality of coverage of women’s issues remained controversial. They also observed that over The International Women’s Decade, as declared by the United Nations, the press had given a fair amount of coverage in terms of quantity of
news in regard to women and violence. However, the quality of press coverage had been extremely poor. The slant given to issues like rape, dowry, or domestic violence had been very sensational. In short the content of coverage on women’s concerns were presented predominantly in event-oriented news stories and there too very little coverage was issue-oriented. Further, the women activist claimed that press had not really been able to keep up with issues, which the women’s movement had been raising and the links that the women’s movement had been able to make between issues of domestic violence, community violence, communalism and so on. When the movement had raised the issue of domestic violence in the early 1980s, its focus was quite narrow. In addition, despite the movement moved far ahead by making links between domestic violence and general economy, domestic violence and politics, role of the state and role of criminal in politics, the press did not take note of it. Consequently, press became a party to the marginalization of women as political beings, human beings, and the movement as a movement.

Looking further into the content analysis of women’s issues, during the summit of women movement, the studies were pursued by a group of researchers like Ammu Joseph, Kalpana Sharma, Shubhra Gupta, Prasanna Ramaswamy, Vasantha Surya, Maitreyi Chatterjee and Sonal Shukla. While Ammu Joseph and Kalpana Sharma were interested in the English press, Shubhra Gupta, Prasanna Ramaswamy, Vasantha Surya and Maitreyi Chatterjee chose to concentrate on the vernacular press. Kalpana Sharma and Ammu Joseph, as the editors of these studies, gave the reasons that the coverage of women’s issues in English press was selected because English is considered to be the language of the ruling class, deems more influential as it caters to the economically and politically powerful elites. The vernacular press, though lacking this certain quality, acquires the advantage of being read and spoken by much wider spectrum of class and plays a vital role in arousing communal passion. According to the editors, the studies on print media focusing on daily newspapers, general interest magazines and women’s magazines were designed to span roughly a decade from 1979 to 1988. Rather than examine the coverage of all issues concerning women over this period, it was chosen to concentrate on five landmark issues. Dowry deaths, rape, sex determination test and sati were selected mainly because women’s movement had drawn national and media
attention to them, while the Shah Bano controversy came into national focus essentially because of its religious and political dimensions.

Analyzing the contents of the newspapers as examples taken from The Times of India (English), The Indian Express (English), The Hindustan Times (English), The Hindu (English), The Statesman (English), The Navbharat Times (Hindi), Dina Mani (Tamil), Ananda Bazar Patrika (Bengali) and Janmabhoomi (Gujarathi), the studies found that during the period 1979-1988 most of the newspapers played a significant role in highlighting the women’s issues. Their coverage was carried in various formats such as news items, editorial articles, news analysis, middle articles, letters to the editors, cartoons, photographs, special supplements, etc. The studies also revealed that though there was not much differentiation between the English and vernacular newspapers considering the space devoted to women’s issues, the vernacular newspapers tended to show more conservative opinion compared to the English newspapers. This was partly because of the cultural proximity between the publication and the traditional readership. Many times the vernacular newspapers were accused of being more inflammatory than the English as their language are more expressive and emotive. In spite of being alleged as such, the vernacular newspapers defended themselves claiming to be the real voice of Indian people. Some journalists in the Hindi newspapers held the view that the Hindi newspapers reflect more accurately the feeling and aspiration of people living in the Hindi belt than any English language newspapers, particularly when the letter is published from the Hindi heartland.

Among the women’s issues described above, the sati setting in Rajasthan and the Shah Bano case, a Muslim woman asserting her right for the divorcee’s maintenance attracted the attention of newspapers rather than others. Many times, these issues were placed in the Front and editorial page, indicating their values of having newsworthiness. It was noticeable that throughout the period of vehement campaign against sati, almost all the newspapers in both English and vernacular language took an affirmative stand in condemning sati as it represented a retrogressive practice, ushering ‘shame’ to the nation. Other than this, they also demanded serious action to be taken by the Indian Government in banning sati creed. In short, most of the newspapers agreed unanimously that sati as an evil practice needed to be eradicated.
Similar to the coverage sati received, the Shah Bano controversy gained high support from most of the newspapers. They criticized intensively the detrimental status of Muslim women under the Muslim personal law and urged for an adoption of a uniform civil code. However, the criticism posed by researchers passing on the indulgence of newspapers in both languages regarding the sati and Shah Bano case was that, the newspapers frequently carried these two issues in the Front and editorial page because the issues acquired political overtones, which automatically attained prominence and was ranked high in the traditional hierarchy of newsworthiness. It was not because the newspapers felt sympathetic towards women’s movement. Regarding the sati issue it received more attention from the newspapers when the minister of state for home started pointing fingers at the state government, the opposition and other social service organizations for the situation. Similarly, the Shah Bano case received visibility only when Arif Mohammed Khan, the well-known politician, made its political implications. As a result, the content of the issues gradually moved away from the question of human rights violations and women’s oppression to the usual mutual mud slinging by political parties. Considering Shah Bano case in particular, the studies insisted that a call for the adoption of a uniform civil code was the best solution. However, a line accepted and pushed by all the five English newspapers reflected only the unquestioning belief that, what was acceptable to the majority community (the Hindus) should also be accepted by all minorities, especially Muslims.

The same attitude towards these issues was also shown in the other vernacular newspapers, which perhaps was even more radical in its religious and communal approach. The Muslim personal law was viewed by the vernacular newspapers as the defilement of fundamentalist Muslim organizations, whereas the ‘sati’ was interpreted by some vernacular newspapers as the religion sanction according to ‘Shattra’. The studies in both languages of the newspapers nevertheless, resolved that the unprecedented coverage given to these issues was primarily because coincidentally the issues conformed to the established news values. In this respect, the newspapers considered the issues as brutal incidents, which held potential for violence. Further, the issues comprised sensational news values as their event shocked the targeted readers by and large.
In contrast to the Shah Bano and the Sati controversy, the issues of death dowry, rape and female foeticide in both the English and vernacular newspapers did not yet attain sufficient coverage. The rape and death dowry issues usually were carried as a small, single-column either in cities page or other inside pages. At best, they appeared as articles written in the ‘Sunday Edition’. If any report, article and analysis were carried in the Front or editorial page, one can assume that it either involved bills or big campaign organized by various women’s organizations. The criticism raised by the researchers on the coverage of rape and death dowry in the newspapers was that the coverage mostly emphasized on sensational human interest rather than analytical report. The quality of coverage pointed by the studies was shallow, superficial and lacked insight. All above, it reflected only the dominant attitude of patriarchy in the newspapers. To be precise, the rape and dowry death issues would have never been highlighted in the newspapers had it not acquired the legal processes or been pressurized by the women’s groups.

The poorest coverage on women’s issues during 1979-1988 was to be found in the issue of female foeticide and the misuse of medical technique of amniocentesis to discover the sex of the foetus. In the English newspapers, this issue received minimum coverage compared to others. The female foeticide issue normally was carried somewhere around the inside pages or in the magazine section. It was hardly reported, discussed nor featured in the Front or editorial page. In the vernacular newspapers, the situation was even worse because some newspapers did not carry it at all. The reasons given by newspapers on being neglected the concerned issue was that the issue was somewhat middle class, urban and a rare practice in the state where the newspapers operated. It is also important to note that whenever the reports or features of female foeticide were carried, most of the newspapers did not take a firm stand in protesting it, while a few newspapers tried to leave the controversy to the personal choice of individual.

The point put forward by the researchers when dealing with the coverage of women’s issues in the newspapers was that the coverage seldom looked upon the problems from the women’s perspective. Hard reality, which the common women encountered in every day lives, had it been neglected, it was overlooked. At best it would be carried on women’s page or Sunday edition. Women’s issues would be regarded as
newsmakers in the Front or editorial page only when the issues were involved with politics and law. Most researchers agreed that the coverage on women's issues in general was never being taken seriously; they were superficial, lacking analytical context and ultimately lost its significance as the time went by.

The women's magazines, despite of having the advantage of being free from the dead line pressure and directly reach to the women readers, the content of women's issues in general was even much lighter than the newspapers. The studies on content analysis of women's magazines in both English and vernacular language, taking Femina (English), Eve's Weekly (English), Grihshobha (Hindi), Sananda and Sukanya (Bengali), Mangariyar Malar (Tamil), and Stree (Gujrathi) as examples by the same group of scholars as did m the newspapers indicated that, though the English women's magazines gave more concern on women's issues like rape, dowry death, Shah Bano case, female foeticide and sati than the vernacular women's magazine, the coverage of the above mentioned issues by and large was still inadequate in both quantitative and qualitative aspects. According to studies, it was found that in comparison with the 'soft' column such as fashion, grooming, guides, recipes and home craft instructions, which were regularly catered, the serious women's issues as mentioned were carried only occasionally. Furthermore, when consider the content of women's issues in general, the researchers commented that the content was basically narrow, superficial and lack of sharp analysis. Besides the view of ordinary women, the target readers of the magazine went unheard. This was the broad picture of the women's magazines irrespective of their being English or vernacular language.

In the English women's magazines, issues like rape, death dowry, Shah Bano, female foeticide and sati found more space than that of vernacular. The fact that their target readers, who could be termed as 'modern' women perhaps was responsible for this situation. Unlike the English women's magazines, the standpoint of the vernacular women's magazines was bound to be traditional. Hence it was not surprising to witness a total absence of some women's issues like rape and female foeticide in some vernacular women's magazines. 'Rape', from the vernacular women's magazine's point of view was nothing other than an immoral matter, which the good Indian women must not be
exposed to it, while female foeticide was somewhat being recognized as the right of women to choose the sex of their children.

The failure of the women’s magazines in carrying ‘serious’ women’s issues derived from the facts that, women’s magazines in both vernacular and English language were compelled by commercial compulsions and had been under pressure, especially since the latter half of the 1980s, to ‘lighten’ their content in order to stay ahead in the race of advertisements. These inherent characteristics of commercial women’s magazines made it difficult for their staff, however senior and serious, to make fundamental changes in the basic structure and thrust of the publications. They could, at best, make a difference for a while on certain issues. It has been said that as long as society continues to regard women primarily as homemakers whatever else they may do with their lives, women’s magazines will continue to present and cater to them as such. 160

The hypocritic characteristic of press media towards women’s issues and movement showed in the dual image of women in the newspapers and magazines as well. For example in Sunday (April 26/87): in Khushwant Singh’s ‘Gossip Sweet and Sour’ column, there was a typical KS comment on women’s anatomy. The same column had a six page special report on atrocities against Indian women, which included interviews with activist groups and lawyers. In Gentleman (May 1987): The ‘Notebook’ column had light hearted items on Ershad’s second wife; Miss India’s participation in the Miss Universe contest; ‘Love is Bigamous’ on actress Jayaprada’s marriage to an already married man, and love-life of ‘seductive’ dancer Leena Das.

In Femina, the ‘sex’ column had a serious piece written by its editor Vimala Patil, and the ‘people’ page had a profile of an award winning feminist journalist. 161 In Indian Express, the Sunday magazine carried militant feminist features, but the Monday paper’s City notebook contained snide items deriding ‘the libbers’. In The Times of India, while informative articles on women and law appeared on the edit page, sexist cartoons were regular fare in the Sunday magazine section. Notably, both The Times of India and Hindustan Times took a sarcastic comment on some aspects of the women’s movement. In this account, Vimal Balasubrahmanyam was of view that the mass media opted a mix policy because it helped in selling the newspapers. However, one could notice that the mix policy did not carry a committed and ethical stand on the women’s question though
many women’s issues were covered. Besides, if there was a serious report on women, it was because of the women’s question was ‘in’, not because of the attitude of male journalists towards women’s issues and the movement had undergone change. To be precise, the ‘mix’ policy carried by media is in abundance in the newspapers as well as the women magazines even today. The stereotyped articles on fashion, beauty tips, recipes, grandma’s remedies are catered because of their high potentiality to attract a large number of women readers, while articles both informative and educative such as women and health, women and law, etc. play a vital role in fulfilling the responsibility of the press. 162

Problems of Women Journalists in Contemporary India: An Analysis

Drawing from the available documents, the problems of women journalists in independent period can be summarized as follows:

1. The gender discrimination in the newspaper organizations since the early years of independence to the present time basically derives from the retard attitude of the male editors and journalists as they feel that journalism as a profession is not suited for women. If not all, some of the editors have claimed that they are reluctant to recruit women working in the newspapers because of several reasons. Firstly, the nature of work requires toughness both mentally and physically. Since women are considered to be the weaker sex, this profession is too exhausting for them. Secondly, women journalists are more subject to danger caused by transportation, travelling and other harassment than male journalists. Therefore it is quite difficult for women to deal with ‘hard news’ beats including ‘dacoit’ and ‘riot’ events. Thirdly, as women’s life is restricted by the social control rather than men, women journalists are not able to work for night shift. Fourthly, some women journalists seem not to be serious in performing their work in comparison with the male counterparts, they consider journalism only as a waiting room for marriage. Fifthly, most of the married women journalists can not devote enough time to the newspaper organizations as their primary role in the society is assumed to be a housewife and a mother. Henceforth, women are compelled to conduct themselves for
the ‘home’ first and any other responsibility would come after. Sixthly, by nature and socialization some women are not hard working, if they work partly because they want to earn a little pocket money for the new cosmetic and attire. Otherwise, they come to office merely for spending their time in gossiping and chit chatting.

2. The abovementioned attitude of the male journalists automatically becomes the major hurdle preventing women to join this profession. According to the studies, the problems faced by women journalists since the early years of independent period, to be precise before 1960s, emerged at both quantitative and qualitative level. In respect to quantitative level, various studies ascertained that women journalists in this period constituted only a few number out of total number of journalists all over country. When taking qualitative level into account, the studies revealed that the highly existing vice of gender discrimination pushed women in this period to deal either with ‘soft news’ beats like art, culture, children, women entertainment, etc., issues or desk work. The reason attributed to this incident claimed by the male editors was, since women are fragile human being, of whom subject to the danger of various harassment caused by circumstance of working, take for example the inconvenience of travelling and the way to conduct themselves with the male news sources etc., they inevitably need the protection policy from the newspaper organizations. This is a reason why they were prevented from tackling with ‘hard news’ coverage like politics, economics, foreign affairs, military, defence, etc., which many time requires persons to stand by in the ‘night shift’. All these difficulties subsequently resulted in the marginalization of women journalists from being promoted in the decision making level. For women journalists in this period, at best, they could reach only the post of editors in art, culture, entertainment, children, women’s, etc., issues, which in turn created a feeling of being inferior as the role they played lacked authority to direct the content of news in general and even in their own page.

3. Since the period before 1960s is regarded as the nascent period of women venturing into journalism, the ultimate authority in the decision making
process was still wielded by the male counterparts. Various studies on press media showed that during this time, it was men, who acted as the chief editors of the newspapers, news magazines, general magazines and even in the women’s magazines irrespective of their being English or vernacular language. As the women’s movement of this particular time was a sort of complacent and placid, the picture of women journalists in regard to their role playing in the press organizations was also docile and silent.

4. The denial of women to participate in the decision making process of this period unavoidably affected the content of women’s issues presented in the newspapers as well as the women’s magazines. As the ultimate authority in the decision making process was still in the hands of male editors, they were prone to interpret women’s issues only as ‘soft-matter’. This was evident in the prevalent columns written by women journalists like recipe, fashion, beauty tips, etc. During this period Indian journalism hardly witnessed women journalists breaking their traditional role of work in the media organizations.

5. It is because the content of press in this particular time was mainly designed by the male editors. Therefore the image of women being portrayed in the newspapers and the magazines merely repeated the role of traditional women as inscribed in the ancient epics. With this image, women readers were considered by both press and entrepreneurs as great consumers. They were encouraged to buy several new products through articles as well as advertisements.

6. It was only after 1960s that a vast number of women were seen venturing into journalism. This trend kept carrying on and reached its peak after The International Women’s Year in 1975. During The International Women’s Decade (1975-1985) the number of women journalists in press increased rapidly, some of them in the newspapers even broke their traditional role, entering into ‘hard news’ coverage like politics, economics, foreign affairs, defence, etc., which normally belonged to the male domain. However, the number of women involving in ‘hard news’ beats during this time was still low. According to the studies, the majority of them would prefer to tackle
with ‘women’ and ‘social’ issues, etc. Further, they reinterpreted ‘women’ and social’ issues as ‘serious’ news. The serious issues, which the women journalists raised during this time ranged from women’s rights to human rights. Interestingly, though women journalists of this period contributed their news reporting, articles and analysis in accordance with socio-economic and political change, their work was still evaluated by the male editors as ‘soft news’.

7. Though during The International Women’s Decade, ‘serious’ women’s issues had been frequently published in the newspapers and magazines, it was partly because the issues were ‘in’ or ‘current’ and not because the attitude of male editors had undergone change. This reflected in the negative image of women being portrayed by press, in both newspapers and magazines irrespective of the language written in. Various studies asserted that the reports on rape case, dowry death, female foeticide, etc., concentrated more on sensation rather than trying to unfold the real cause of the events. The studies also found out that most of the coverage both in the newspapers and the magazines restricted its content only on human-interest aspect and neglected to provide analytical context for the case study. Therefore, the news reports and articles basically skimmed only the surface of issues. If women’s issues appeared in the Front or editorial page, one could assume that because it fitted the news values owning to its political relevance or prominent figure involvement, not because it was viewed from the women angle for the well being of women in general. In brief, the image of women in press media around The International Women’s Decade portrayed by the newspapers and magazines was nothing else, but the powerless human beings, passive creatures and victims of society, etc.

8. Along with the image of being passive and powerless human beings, women of The International Women’s Decade had been portrayed as sex objects too. The movement against indecent advertisement hoarding in various forms of mass media including the newspapers and magazines showed clearly how media in general exploited women body for the financial benefit of their own
organizations. The blatant promotion of women as sex objects in press media proved that women journalists were deprived from the decision making process.

9. It must be because of the aforementioned reasons that made a number of women journalists during 1975-1985, especially in the newspaper organizations realized that if they wanted to progress in the profession, they must relegate their interest on women and social issues. Thus many of them did not hesitate to shift from women and social issues into 'hard news' coverage. As far as gender discrimination was concerned, they had to try hard to prove themselves in the male territory. According to the studies, these considerable women journalists seemed to feel bitter of being called ‘women journalists’ as it meaning was tacitly implicative to feminist journalists, who dealt only with women and social issues. In fact, they would rather prefer to call themselves and be called by others as ‘professional journalists’ and not ‘women journalists’.

10. During The International Women’s Decade though the status of women journalists especially in the newspapers was not very advanced, a number of them had reached the post of editors but the majority of them could become the editors either in women’s page or Sunday edition. To be precise, the post of editors in ‘hard news’ coverage was still a long way for women in this period. In fact, if any woman journalist of this period had an opportunity to be the editor of ‘hard news’ coverage, she would be considered as an exceptional case.

11. After 1975, particularly during the years of magazine boom in 1980s Indian journalism witnessed a great number of women journalists working in the women’s magazines. It would probably be only in the women’s magazines that women journalists of this period emerged as the editors, having full power in determining the content of the magazines. But since the women’s magazines were considered by the publications as ‘money spinning’ rather than a channel to educate women, the content of women’s magazines directed by women editors could not be taken up seriously. Henceforth, the women’s
magazines of this period had to opt for the mix policy. The ‘serious’ women issues like dowry death, rape, wife beating, etc., appeared side by side with trivialized columns such as fashion, beauty tips, cookery, etc. It is important to note that under the pressure of being ‘light’ or ‘soft’ by publications, the women journalists of the women magazines tried their best to educate women according to their maximum capacity. However, they were not able to get credibility in the field of journalism as they were treated by the newspapers, news magazines, general interest magazines and men magazines as the second class citizen of press media’s population.

12. The degree of gender discrimination in mass media organizations during this period varied according to various variables such as the form of media, region, language, history, financial background, ideology and individual attitude of journalist, etc. The study on content analysis of women’s issues around the years of The International Women’s Decade revealed that due to their primary function in forming public opinion, the newspapers in both English and vernacular language tended to report on women’s issues more seriously than that of women’s magazines. The women magazines, in spite of not being round the clock, in the absence of deadline factor, the pressure of being ‘light’ for targeted women readers prevented the editorial staff to cover women’s issues in depth and in an analytical manner. However, when we compare the content analysis between the English and vernacular press, the studies found that the attitude towards women’s issues of the English newspapers and women’s magazines was more progressive than the vernacular ones. In the vernacular newspapers, the approach to women’s issues, if not all, most of them, showed conservative and traditional opinion. Similarly, most of the vernacular women’s magazines enjoyed being in ‘quietness’ on women’s issues as ‘good Indian women’, who always remain happy in the warm cocoon.

13. From 1990, to the present time, the biggest wave of women journalists has swept into all forms of mass media. In press, women journalists seem to find a more convenient place than their precedence. Studies on women journalists in
the newspapers reveals that though at present gender discrimination has not been practiced in the newspaper organizations as obviously as it was, it does exist. Moreover, it transforms to more subtle forms. Some women journalists complain that despite the absence or slice of gender discrimination in terms of ‘entrance’ or ‘recruitment’ and sexual division of labour, they still experience sexist attitude through other forms such as passing comment to them in the guise of jokes. It is true that today men journalists do not perceive journalism for women as a ‘waiting room of marriage’ any longer. But they can not avoid teasing them either as ‘the great gossiper of the office’ or ‘the earner of pocket money for saris and cosmetics’. All these comments according to the opinion of some women journalists prove how the sexist attitude is deeply rooted in the minds of male journalists. So the only way for the women journalists of today to cope with this problem is trying to ignore or otherwise be patient.

14. The emergence of women journalists in the newspapers and women’s magazines as both reporters and editors from 1975 though helped in a considerable degree of raising women’s issues quantitatively, when considering the approach dealing with the content qualitatively, there still remained a question. Actually, the upcoming of women editors in terms of number does not contribute much to the perspective of viewing women’s problems, if the women editors still carry the dominant idea of patriarchy.

15. The remarkable point with reference to the problems of women journalists in the present time is that, under the quiet atmosphere of the women’s movement when the torrential spate of capitalism and consumerism influx and merge into press, almost none of women journalists of today whether be it in the newspapers or magazines, has held the ‘feminist’, ‘Marxist’ or ‘socialist’ ideology as their senior women journalists in late 1970s once used to practice. Actually, it is not only that they are not very keen to write articles on under privileged class / caste and sex, but they even seem to forget what social consciousness and responsibility means for journalism as a profession. As a result women journalists of today are able to write anything merely for the purpose of increasing the newspaper’s circulation. It is therefore, not
surprising to witness the worst image of women being portrayed by press in the present time when compared to the previous period. The study on the role and problems of women journalist of the present time will be described in details in the later part.

In support of women journalists in action at present, naturally on the spot dialogue through personal interview including questionnaire survey was needed. The following is a brief relating to what was discussed with each interviewee and what was their response towards questionnaire. The researcher hopes that the next chapter would sufficiently bring to light the problems of women journalists as experienced by them.
End Notes

Chapter IV

6. Ibid p. 32
8. Ibid p. 7
14. Ibid p. 56
15. Ibid p. 56.
27. Ibid p.14-15
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226
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