ABSTRACT

The Constitution of India guarantees equal status to men and women and prohibits any discrimination on grounds of sex, class, creed etc. Despite all the legal provisions and stronger laws, women are still treated as inferior and subordinate to men. The Constitution of India not only prohibits any discrimination on the grounds of sex but also favours to make special provisions in interest of women by the State. But in this world of male domination, women have to compromise with their rights. In the 21st century, India is rapidly emerging as a global power, for half of its population, the women across the country, struggle to live life with dignity continues. Women are facing problems in every sphere of life whether employment, access to health care or property rights. The attention required is still not being paid to the issues that concern this section of population. Women empowerment in India is still a distant dream. There exists a wide gap between the goals enunciated in the constitution, legislation, policies, plans, programmes and related mechanisms on the one hand and the situational reality of the status of women in India, on the other hand.

India is one of the fastest developing countries but women in India continue to be discriminated. The declining sex ratio in India amply portrays the discrimination shown towards women at the stage of birth. Women may be have stardom in any stream, but are getting harassed every day by their surroundings. They are victims of crime directed specifically at them- from rape, kidnapping and abduction, dowry-related crimes, to sexual harassment, etc. Most of the married women in India are victims of domestic violence. The increasing violence against women shown in television and films and their vulgar portrayal as objects of sexuality is also an important contributing factor to the escalating violence against women in India. The crimes against women in India are growing at a rampant speed. Women, irrespective of their class, caste and educational status, are not safe. The lack of any serious effort to rectify the weaknesses in dealing with the crimes against women further compound the situation and result is that the conviction rate remains abysmally low.

Media, also considered as a fourth pillar of democracy has always a played pivotal role in creating awareness among the masses. It has helped masses in identifying
good or bad and choosing the right one over wrong. It shapes the public image and reflects public opinion in the society. Media is believed to be a reliable source of information and a tool which can raise the issues of unsung heroes of the society. It not only imparts information to the masses but also brings changes in the existing stereotypes. Media is also expected to report the issues which remain unseen and unnoticed without any prejudice. Reporting issues in the media does not mean the solution of any problem. It can only elevate the issues and create awareness about the happenings in the society. The policy makers still have to come with effective solutions for ensuring equality in the society. Sometimes policy makers or planners do not pay much attention to the issues which are not covered or raised by the media, even if the issue is extremely critical. It is the need of the hour to think about each and every issue of both sexes for bringing changes in the society.

Media is an essential part of the change because it has credibility and capability of reporting issues without any fear. Media, especially newspapers have enlarged their campaign in each field like social, cultural, political, educational and economic sectors. It should also look into the matter of women’s issues with serious concern. This is the need of hour to come forward and work shoulder to shoulder for achieving this goal of gender equality. Media needs to play proactive role in this regard. In the contemporary society media has the power to make change in the society. Besides, informing, educating and entertaining the masses, it shapes public opinion. Without media’s interference gender equality is not possible.

Mainstream English as well as vernacular press has to work more proactively. Most of the times mainstream dailies do not give adequate coverage even to the most important issues either because of paucity of space or because of not reaching to the incident. So, it is the duty of local vernacular press to actively give importance to those issues which are left by mainstream English press without any bias or prejudice. The newspapers can raise the issues before the policy makers. These can create pressure on the policy makers to take decision on the right cause. This is only possible when newspapers will report news in gender neutral way. We only come to know about the issue or happening only by reading the newspapers. If the issue would not be taken up by the media, deprived section of society will not get empowered. And the empowerment of
any country is only possible by the contributions of male and female both. For this purpose, female work also needs to be appreciated and brought to the mainstream.

In a democratic country, media acts as a cornerstone which imparts information on public issues and through which mass audiences convey their problems to the policy makers. Media not only help audiences in raising national issues but also in deciding good or bad outcomes. It is expected that the issues appeared in the media will have fair chances of getting on the agenda of both the public and policy makers whereas the issues missing in media remain unnoticed and unseen.

There is difference between believing that media have long-term attitudinal effects on their audience, and setting this up as a hypothesis to be proven. And further, that given audiences are not society as a whole. Nor are individuals who may be influenced separate from the audience as a whole. This depends on assumptions about how one defines women’s issues in a given medium, how one categorizes types of women’s issues and then how one measures incidents - by number, for example, or by times space given to them. Therefore content analysis method was adopted to carry out the study in order to track down the coverage of women’s issues in English, Hindi and Urdu newspapers. Three mainstream dailies (one from each language) of India selected for the study were- TOI, DJ and RRS from January 2005 to December 2010. For the purpose of analysis, the researcher has employed systematic random sampling method. Systematic random sampling is a type of probability sampling technique. First sample was taken as the newspapers published on January 01, 2005. Following the random sampling method, the newspapers published after every seven days were taken from each language. For example on January 01, 2005 there was Saturday. So the next newspaper was from next week’s Sunday flowing the next weeks’ Monday and so on. The sample constituted of 275 newspaper copies from each language. There were a total of 825 newspaper copies taken into account for the purpose of the study.

The thesis is divided into five chapters:

**Chapter-1** deals with the introduction, with main focus on women’s issues and historical background of newspapers in India.

**Chapter-2** covers reviews the literature available relevant to the research topic and spells out the research methodology and the approach adopted in the study. It focuses mainly on
content analysis, agenda setting theory of mass media, objectives and hypotheses of the study.

**Chapter-3** carries the analysis of coverage of women’s issues in The Times of India, Dainik Jagran and Roznama Rashtriya Sahara with special focus on the coverage in terms of area covered as well as numbers of stories over six year period.

**Chapter-4** carries comparative analysis of coverage of women’s issues in The Times of Hindu, Dainik Jagran and Roznama Rashtriya Sahara. It also deals with qualitative analysis of women’s issues in three language dailies applying framing analysis technique.

**Chapter-5** presents the findings of the study and wraps up with conclusion.

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

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

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

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