ABSTRACT

Today, the world has entered into the age of digitization with information societies and information highways. Media has also widened its spectrum incorporating advanced technologies to disseminate information. But even in such modernized society the women is still under represented in all forms of media. The under representation of women in media has been a focus of communication research in both the developed and developing countries and how the media executes immense power to generate its influence on the masses by manufacturing news in which media fosters public agendas has been a central strand of such work. Research is carried to find how the women are represented in the news agendas and how the feminists instigate to carry the issues of women concern in media to become a part of public debate.

The present study offers arguments on the representation of women in print media in the light of binary opposition. The lack of representation of women in media is due to the perpetuation of patriarchal hegemony in the social structure of a society. The visibility of women in the print news media or in the decision making process is very discouraging. Again, there is positive projection of women which reflects that women issues are not totally rule out even though they are covered marginally. The binary opposition looks into both sides of the approach i.e. positive and negative. The empirical data collected were dissected by using both the quantitative and the qualitative content analysis.

Women and media:

The women and media has been the subject of study for researchers all over the world. When we talk of women and media the first question that strikes us is why women is the subject of media and why not men? Why media and gender becomes the issues of discussion? The media’s portrayal of women and gender inequality has been a matter of concern among media analyst and researchers across the globe. Media plays a vital role in setting opinions, influences our behavior, attitudes, social interactions through the presentation of image. The mass media have played a
decisive role in perpetuating gender stereotypes through the media messages and images across the globe. There exists a deep rooted complex relationship between media and the patriarchal structure of the society.

The women's movement of the 60s and the 70s questioned the dominance of patriarchy and advocated for equality. These movements drew the attention of the media. The mass media influences the cultural domain by constructing social messages and people draw conclusion from the constructed reality. Media, regarded as the mirror of society reflects the happenings of the society. The news reportage is institutional methods of making information reach the audience or readers; it is gathered by media professionals. The news reflects the form of society, indeed referred as a “mirror of reality” (Tauchman, 1978). The relationship between media and women is based on certain structure where woman is used as an ‘object’. The post liberalization made media market-oriented and the media-market has expanded opportunities for women but the problem rises in the representation of women. The media, an important form of discourse, that structurally frames, shapes and reflect public’s opinion on various societal issues.

The representation paradigm in the media is generally male centered because of the prevalent patriarchal system of society. Men tend to dominate the decision-making position, and hold the top position in almost all fields. The male hegemony in media and the lack of women media professionals led to the underrepresentation of women in all forms of media. The United Nations decade for women (1976-1985) worked for the increase in the global news infrastructure and inclusion of women news from the progressive women's perspectives. But the question lies has such international forum brought about any radical change in the representation of women? The answer is no. This pinpoints that media follows the trend, which is male dominated. It fails to apprehend that media can enact on different viewpoints and ideas rendered by women to produce an enormous range of vision to bring the fundamental positive changes.

The various women's organization and women activists protested against media's negative portrayal of women. However, it is still rare that the media presents women as contributors to the development process or as professionals in their own field. The lack of a true gender-sensitive appreciation and analysis of women’s issues in media has allowed exploitative and derogatory images of women in media. Joseph and
Sharma (1991) mentions that, ‘when there is less or no vested interest of the media organization there may be some slippage in the coverage by the mass media. The tactical dealing of mass media is reflected in the conformity with elite priorities. Oppression against women is viewed as common social phenomenon and not treated as merit coverage.’ Issues regarding violence, atrocities, aggression against women are sensationalized instead of protesting. Another aspect of the study is the representation of women in the print media which states, ‘Press in India does not entirely ignore women’s events or processes concerning the less powerful, including women, such coverage tends, by and large, to be fairly superficial.’ The study further mentions that, ‘the gender perspective have not yet been properly integrated into the process of newsgathering. Thus even when an incident touched the lives of women, their views are rarely sought; even when an issue concerns them directly, their voices are barely heard.’ Tauchman defines the under representation or absence of women from the news as “symbolic annihilation” – together constitutes a combination ‘condemnation, trivialization and erasure.’

**The Indian print media scenario**

In developing countries the reach of print media is much less but the importance of the print media is felt in influencing public opinion. The news/issues covered by the print media is constructed and based on agenda setting. Gallagher (1980) pointed out that women and women’s issues are comparatively less covered in the newspapers. The general pattern of print media coverage is stereotypical but with increasing feminist critique and feminist professional in print media, the situation has changed. Since 1980 the various women’s movements has given a way to the coverage of the women’s issues in newspapers and periodicals. The scenario has changed today as women became more visible in the in the mainstream print media. The feminist pressure inculcated on media led to gradual increase in the space devoted to women/women’s issues and declines the anti-women coverage. But the newspapers are considerably ambiguous in representation of women/women’s issues. Research suggests that women constitute more than half of the world’s population. But do we see them or hear their voices frequently in the news media? News acts as a mirror of the world, but the question arises that whether we are presented with the clear
unambiguous reality or the distorted reality? It distorts reality, flattening the importance of certain groups, while pushing others to the margin (Gallaghar 2005).

Hegemony is defined as the influence, power or domination of one social group over another. It refers to the state in which the individual becomes unaware of the domination force which include traditions, institutions, family, education, socialization, etc., which forms the basic ground for hegemony. Factors like the economic factor, political factor and the societal factor which has deep rooted evidences of prejudices against women. The social background of the media professionals interlocking the social, political, economic and cultural forces, the diversity of society in terms of class, caste, creed, gender, race, and ethnicity has imperative influence in their professional output. Recent surveys show that the present day system of mass communication expresses, to a considerable extent, gender representations of the sovereign patriarchal ideology (Burnsdon 2000; Haskell 1987; Shaltuc 1997). Studies shows that women are underrepresented and even when they appear in news they are shown as victims or passive reactors of the events in the news media (Bailey, 1994 and Ross, 1994).

Press in India, do not completely ignore the women’s issues but such coverage is unable to explore the roots of problems instead it is presented in a relatively arbitrary and rather superficial form. Though women are comparatively less represented yet women’s group in India could project the problems fairly effectively through the press. The other aspect of press or news media is reflective of the kind of women’s issues that attracts the media attention. Studies show that the presentation of crime against women in news media led to multi-dimensional misrepresentation. The current media trend shows that there is increase or over representation of crime in the news media (Marsh, 1991). The process of news representation of stories that are constructed by journalists passes through a complex selection procedure and agenda - setting processes.

The Objectives of the study:

The primary aim of this work was to analyze the media representation of women in the newspapers. The study is explored to find the nature and extent of coverage of
women's issues in terms of the pattern of coverage, forms of presentation, types of coverage, placement and source of coverage. In order assess the representation of women's issues an in-depth analysis into the present gender-coverage situation, the women issues has been dissected to get the better understanding of the subject.

➢ To study the extent of space and frequency of coverage of women's issues by the three leading English newspapers of Assam.
➢ To find out the nature and pattern of the coverage of women's issues in the newspapers under discussion.
➢ To find out form of presentation of the women's issues portrayed in women's issues in the three newspapers
➢ To find the types of coverage
➢ To study the placement of the news coverage
➢ To find the source of information
➢ To find out the comparative analysis of the coverage of women's issues in the three newspapers.

Research Questions

Since the study is exploratory by nature, the researcher has formulated the following research questions:

1. What is the space devoted to the coverage of women's issues in the three sample dailies?

2. What is the frequency of coverage of women's issues in the selected newspapers?

3. What kind of emphasis is given by these dailies in terms of nurture and pattern of women's issues?

4. What is the context of the types of coverage of the women's issues in the three sample dailies?

5. What is the placement of the women's news/issues in the newspaper?

6. What are the different sources of the news stories covered in the newspaper?

7. What is the level of comparative importance accorded to issues identified by the selected newspapers?
Methodology:

The study is an attempt to understand the research method in analyzing the role of print media in the representation of women’s issues in three English newspapers of Assam. To investigate the coverage and portrayal of women’s issues in three selected English newspapers, The Times of India, Telegraph and the Eastern Chronicle the research method of content analysis has been applied. The unit of analysis in the study is all the items issues/news on women, including news, articles, feature, opinion stories, editorials, post editorials, columns, letter to the editor etc. The issues are categorized under different parameters framed to code the items. The sampling technique adopted for the present study is purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is also known as judgemental sampling or relevance sampling. The selected Guwahati editions of the of the three sample newspapers from 01 Jan 2012 to 31 Dec 2012 comprises of the universe. Two days per week, the first and the fifth day of the week, i.e. Sunday and Thursday is selected for the study. The collected data were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. The extent of coverage is measure quantitatively in terms of space and frequency. The nature of coverage is covered quantitatively in terms of form of presentations, types of coverage, tone of presentation, placement and source, the analysis prepared and organized using the MS Excel tool.

Conclusion:

The various women’s issues were brought to the notice of the government and the policy makers by the feminist movement. The feminist movements have proliferated in almost every part of the world raising the cause of women’s concern toward right to equality in socio cultural, legal, economic, and political sphere through the usage of mass media. The theoretical framework of the study shows that representation of women in media is usually constructed reality. The images of women depicted in media are far from the real condition the women are through.

The present study highlights the representation of the women’s issues in print media. It presents a clear picture of the actual situation, analyzing the level of under representation of women’s issues in the light of binary dissection and proposes important steps for greater gender-equity and gender-sensitized media coverage of women’s issue.