CHAPTER-IV

*Women and Media: Resistance and Hope*
I have already indicated that in contemporary social sciences, life histories and biographies have occupied an important role in acquiring sociological knowledge. These narratives in a way inject the spirit of life into the thesis and we come to know about finer and deeper issues and sensibilities, which the other chapters may not have been able to bring out. In the process of interacting with women media persons, I have often come across some extra ordinary stories. And I believe that these stories throw some light in the question I have raised in the thesis. I have chosen some of them, interacted with them more closely and in this chapter I have tried to narrate these stories briefly but meaningfully.

1. RAMI CHHABRA: *The Pioneer of Women Journalism*

It was a thrilling experience for me as Rami Chhabra welcomed me to her drawing room in Safdarjang Enclave bungalow with a graceful smile. I have grown up reading and watching Rami in newspapers and television. I remember the first time I had encountered the word ‘feminist’ in the newspaper column during my formative school days and looked up the dictionary to know the meaning of it. It was the regular column ‘Feminist View Point’ by Rami Chhabra which appeared in *Indian Express*. Her writings did leave some impact in my young mind, for those were the days, newspapers were taken too seriously. We were taught to read the editorial pages of newspapers religiously, collect information, reflect on the social issues and write letters to the editor if
we wished to differ. Then Doordarshan arrived and Rami Chhabra became a well-known television personality and a household name. Her name instinctively came into my mind as I intended to incorporate a chapter on ‘life stories of leading women journalists’ in my research work and she responded to my idea warmly and responsibly. And my conversation with her has been full of insights.

Rami Chhabra belongs to the first generation women journalists of independent India. Her life long commitment to social and developmental cause is reflected in her multi faceted role as media person, NGO professional, administrator, international and national consultant with expertise in human interest issues and social activist. One of the earliest journalists to write on population issues, Rami set a landmark by giving this issue a women’s perspective. She strongly believed in women’s issues as political issues and wrote what she passionately believed in. Throughout her work and career, she has ambitiously attempted to bring women’s issues to the center stage.

Rami was born in 22nd December, 1938 in Delhi in an upper middle class, educated family and graduated in English literature from Miranda House, Delhi University in 1957. She started her career with print media as a freelance journalist and wrote columns on pressing issues in national and international dailies like Hindusthan Times, The Statesman, Indian Express and People (UK).
A well-known television personality, Rami Chhabra has anchored and interviewed for television since its inception. In 1994-95, Doordarshan specially commissioned and twice ran on its national network ‘Aarsi Social Watch’, a series of 12 programmes on critical issues researched, anchored and directed by her.

During 1986-89, Rami Chhabra was specially inducted into administrative service to serve as Additional Secretary in the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India. Under her stewardship, the family planning commission underwent a major transformation, from a narrow, propagandist approach to broad-based social concerns emphasizing women’s perspective and needs. Through her efforts, television and radio were persuaded to institutionalize free time for health and family welfare messages, a concept now being further extended to other areas.

In 1975, she was a UN Fellow to the historic International Women’s Conference at Mexico City and in 1985, a member of the official delegation to the Nairobi International Women’s Conference.

Rami Chhabra is also the founder president of Streebal, a Delhi based multifaceted community service organization, with a particular mandate to strengthen women’s leadership and contribution.

Reflecting on her initial encounter with mass media, she pointed out that it was not a deliberate choice to become a journalist. “As a college student, I used to
occasionally write on issues of my concern for some of the newspapers. But I got married very early in life, at the age of 19. And family responsibilities overshadowed my other interests for a considerable period of time.” Unfortunately for women, the productive age of their life is also their reproductive age. She agrees and emphasizes that the age of marriage for women is a crucial factor in deciding women’s physical and mental health. Some of her early writings have focused on this issue. However, she preserved her interest for writing and continued as a free lance journalist. Her writings had got some recognition by then. There were very few women who were writing in newspapers during that period and getting a full time job in media was somewhat unthinkable. During our conversation, she mentioned some of the major breakthrough in her career that has helped shaping her perspective. “In 1975, I went to the Mexico City to attend the historic International Women’s Conference as a UN Fellow. It was my first exposure to the feminist perspective in an organized sense. I had been writing on women’s issues from the very beginning and as a woman I could very strongly relate to those issues. But the conference made me aware of the gravity of the situation and gave me the conviction to give women’s issues its due coverage. Throughout my career, I have made a conscious effort to bring women’s issues to the center stage.

She also shared yet another major incident that almost instantly provided her the recognition of a world-class journalist. “When I was in Mexico City I came to learn about the end of the war in Vietnam and instinctively decided to visit the country for a first hand knowledge. Though the embassy was a little
hesitant in providing me the visa, they relented after a while. I flew to Vietnam and was the first journalist from the free world to report my overland 3000 kilometre journey across Vietnam from Hanoi to Saigon. The world press overwhelmingly published my writings. Back home in India, Indian Express gave my reports full-page coverage for three subsequent weeks. I think I became an established journalist with this."

Rami has written and advocated extensively on the issue of population for a considerable period of her career. Deriving the inspiration from the International Conference on Women, she wrote a lot of research articles on population issues and gave it a women's perspective. She focused largely on the declining sex ratio and the 'missing women' in her works that got wide recognition. In 1977, she was invited by JRD Tata to join the Population Foundation of India where she worked for two continuous years advocating and restructuring the family planning programmes.

When asked about the role of media in today's modern complex society she said that she is disturbed by the way the values are changing with the changing time. There is a sea change in the way media functioned in yester years and the way it is functioning today. She blamed increasing commercialization of media as dangerous to society. The unhealthy alliance of media with the market is perceived by her to be a grave matter of concern.

I asked her to respond to the way women are portrayed by today's media and she sighed. "I sometimes feel we have lost the battle we had fought once upon
a time. Society is getting more and more patriarchal in the changing scenario and media is patronizing this culture." Commodification of women's body has become the norm of the day. And unfortunately enough, women are also thoroughly intoxicated by this hype and are readily accepting the culture of objectification of their body for male gaze." She is strongly against the way media are creating icons in forms of beauty queens and fashion shows. “Today if you ask a small girl what you want to become when you grow up, the ready answer would be Aishwarya Rai, Yukta Mukhi and the like. Compare it with our time when we grew up idealizing Sarojini Naidu, Sucheta Kripalini or Vijayalaxmi Pandit. I am really worried about the young generation and the value they are inculcating in the process.” My conversation with her was enlightening in many ways. She introduced me to her three decades of association with media and women's issues in a very articulate fashion. And she concluded as I bade her good bye, “Today’s media need a face lift.”

Rami Chhabra is clearly a women's woman. She has always used her platform to advocate women's issues and chooses to remain committed to her conviction throughout.

2. USHA RAI: Breaking the Barrier

I met Usha Rai for the first time in India International Center. I happened to be there in a get together arranged by a common friend and I was introduced to her as a research scholar. I was framing the synopsis for my ph.d. thesis then and told her about my area of interest. She was visibly interested in my subject
and added, 'there has been a sea change in the field of journalism as far as women are concerned and that would probably interest you. You know when I started my career in early sixties there were very few women journalists in the English press. We were literally given the crumbs from the newspaper table such as flower shows, fashion shows and the like. In order to be taken seriously, we had to look grown up and wore saris and salwar kameez to work. Today, mainstream national newspapers are teeming with women. Women are covering all kind of issues. The barrier has been broken.” A sari-clad woman in her early sixties with a knot neatly tied on her back, Usha definitely looks serious. And she means it.

I had a meaningful conversation with her in the Press Institute of India building, Jamia Nagar where she almost effortlessly reflected upon the issues relating to women and mass media.

Usha Rai has established herself as one of the most successful amongst the first generation women journalists of India. She is known as a distinguished development journalist because of the quality of her work on issues of social concern relating particularly to education, health and environment. Her sensitive analysis of social injustices arising out of everyday practices relating to gender and class has achieved great significance. She has consistently worked to overcome the limits of the mass media and documented the injustices faced by women, children and other vulnerable sections of society in
the course of daily living. She has also brought the works of individuals and institutions engaged in the task of social transformation to public attention.

Born in 28th July, 1940, Usha was brought up in a family of journalists and inculcated these values from a very childhood. She completed her education in St. Mary school, Allahabad and St. Francis de Sales college, Nagpur respectively, she moved to Mumbai(then Bombay) to work as a trainee journalist with the Indian Express. In 1964, she joined the Times of India, New Delhi as the first full time reporter and worked there for 27 uninterrupted years. She fondly recalls that period to be the best and most productive years of her working life. She left the Times of India in 1991 when she was deputy Bureau chief and served the Indian Express, Delhi as the development editor for 4.5 years. During her period, she brought out a weekly page on development, common to all editions of Indian Express(before it split). She also worked with the Hindustan Times for 1 year 8 months as features editor. In her span in newspapers she has covered most of the UN Development conferences including the World Education Conference in Jontien, Thailand; Rio Earth Summit; Cairo Population and Development Conference, World Development Conference, Copenhagen and the Habitat Conference in Turky. She is among the first journalists to focus on development issues- education, women's issues, health, environment, people's movements and NGO activities.

In 1998, joined World Wide Fund for Nature in Delhi as communicator for the 'save the tiger' campaign. In 2000 in a record time of two months brought out a
book on the 50 years history of CARE (cooperative for Action and Relief Everywhere), India. In April, 2000 joined Press Institute of India to run a UN Population Fund/Ministry of Health and Family Welfare Media Advocacy Project on population, development issues. In 2001, appointed as the Deputy Director, Press Institute of India, and helped in fund raising and various projects including a manual on reporting on human rights issues with support from British Council, a major report on status of women journalists in India, commissioned by the National Commission for Women and a photo contest cum exhibition for Kuala Lumpur based media group. She also oversees a website www.reportingpeople.com and write a column on environment for the Sunday magazine of the Hindu.

She is the recipient of the Chameli Devi Jain Award for women journalists in 1990 and the FAO science writers award. She has written six books to her credit.

Reflecting upon her background as a journalist, she pointed out that from the very beginning she had the inclination for this profession. “journalism runs in my blood. My maternal grand father had brought a literally publication in Telugu from Nellore in the British period and my mother would run the lino machines. It was also the press from which a lot of the anti British, pro freedom movement propaganda material was brought out. It was a part of my early childhood.” And she took keen interest in writing during her college days, which
marked the beginning of her career. “I used to bring out a wall newspaper for my college and liked meeting people and interviewing them.”

She started her career with Times of India and pursued it sincerely to make it to the top. But the going has never been easy. She recognizes the hurdles of working women on the process of combining family responsibilities with work. She pointed out that it was extremely tough for her in the early seventies and eighties when her children were small and she split from her husband. She had to bring up both kids and manage a career. She had to opt out of chief reportership in Times of India because it meant overseeing copy of the reporters till 10 o’ clock in the night. However, one has to remain committed to the work one strongly believes in. she laughs as she adds, “Right now I have no problems except the long commute of 70 kms to work and back home to Gurgaon everyday.”

Commenting on the role of media in today’s modern complex society she says, “I speak for the print media since I have been largely associated with print. It has become very commercial and newspapers today cater and reflect only the problems of those living in urban India. Newspapers have by and large lost their commitment to society- to write about the needs and problems of the 700 million living in rural India. I think the media is to be blamed to some extent for the lopsided development in India. One sees so much of progress in the cities where as the where as the rural India still lives in the bullock cart age.
While asked on the role of market in influencing media ideology, she pointed out that newspaper in today’s context is treated as an industry for political and economic reasons. The issues are covered on the basis of market demand. She commented, “I am deeply disturbed by the way newspapers are going colour, having 15 or 20 editions of a newspaper as a part of marketing strategy. Small town news is relegated to these small town editions and it is seldom reflected in the national media. Development issues are not getting its due coverage because of their lack of salability.”

She agrees that women’s issues are not getting its due coverage in the media. “Women’s issues are generally given to women journalists. I see an advantage to this because women are sensitive by nature and by their very characteristics can relate to women’s problem better. But though women are increasingly entering into the profession, we don’t see any serious engagement with women’s issues. The fact remains that the ambitious women journalists would rather do what they consider mainstream news so that they can improve their prospects as journalists. And women’s issues are relegated to filler materials.” She adds.

Elaborating on the participation of women journalists in mass media on the basis of her experiences, she points out that things have changed drastically over the years. in the big cities and the national, English language newspapers there is hardly any discrimination on grounds of gender, but in the regional press and in particular in the Hindi heartland women are not welcome as
willingly and work on contract basis in the coloured supplements and are debarred from getting reporting assignments. Reflecting on the media abroad, she says, “I think in abroad too it is much more difficult for women to get the top jobs though it is acknowledged that women are normally better writers and more hard working.”

Reflecting on her own experiences, she goes on to add, “I was the only woman in the editorial section of the Times of India, Delhi, for close to eight years from 1964. The other women were working as receptionists and telephone operators. There was no toilet for women in the editorial floor, so I had to go to the ground floor to share the toilet with the telephone operators.” Recalling yet another incident, she points out, “in fact I remember when I asked for maternity leave the management denied it as they claimed that there was no such provision in the rule book. I really had to fight it out as my right. Things have changed really and thank God, women journalists no more have to fight for basic things like ladies toilet and maternity leave.” She concluded.

However, she celebrates the increasing participation of women in Indian journalism as a positive growth. “There are several women who have done extremely well in the profession and have received due recognition in their areas of specialization not every women may want to be the editor. She may prefer to specialize in a particular area or become a well known columnist. Mrinal Pande is the only women to have become the Editor of Dainik Hindusthan.
Usha Rai is presently working as the Deputy Director, Press Institute of India. She has two children Nitin and Lagan Rai and grandmother to Dhananjay and Ranee.

3. PAMELA PHILIPOSE: The Trend Setter

Pamela Philipose has gained wide readership for her repertoire of notable contributions to the pages of the English print media. Her writings display skills and interests, combining depth, analytical insights and humour, a rare combination in Indian journalism. In addition to investigative field reports, she has written impassioned columns of opinion and editorials focusing on a variety of social concerns.

Pamela was born in 8th December, 1953 in Bangalore and after getting her masters degree from Bangalore University and a diploma in mass communication, joined as a trainee journalist in Times of India, Bombay and flagged off her career. She was taken in by the same organization in 1975. She moved to Delhi after getting married in 1980 and opted for a less tasking job with a women’s magazine called Eve’s Weekly for seven years as she realized it was difficult to manage a demanding career and bringing up two kids simultaneously. However, she joined Indian Express later on and presently working as the associate editor with the same newspaper. Since the late 1970s she has been reporting and analyzing gender and development issues. In 1992 she joined noted environmentalist, Anil Agarwal to help conceptualize and produce Down to Earth, a magazine dedicated to developmental issues. She has
also contributed to two anthologies of women’s writings and was awarded Chameli Devi Jain Prize for Outstanding Woman journalist in 1998. She writes editorials and analytical articles on a broad spectrum of subjects, ranging from equitable laws for women to human rights abuse.

Pamela had nurtured her dream to become a journalist from a very childhood. When asked what inspired her to choose a profession as challenging as journalism she said, “I think it was my love for writing. At the age of 10 I was fairly certain that being a journalist was going to be my future occupation.” Her mother, a respected gynecologist, was keen that she tries and gets into medicine but her interest remained routed in literature and writing. Early encouragement from teachers in this direction however played a crucial role in shaping her dream. She recalls, “Initially my mother (she had lost her father earlier on) did not want me to leave the family home in Bangalore and opt for a career with the Times of India in Bombay. She relented after a while.” Later, her husband, who was also a journalist at that point, was a great source of support. He responsibly took on some of the homecare responsibilities in order to facilitate her career. She adds, “Once we re-located in Delhi in 1991, my parents in law with whom we stay although in a separate flat) also proved to be very accepting of my career.” This familial support certainly went a long way in ensuring her continuation in the profession for close to three decades in a fairly uninterrupted span (apart from the breaks when the children came). She points out that she has always been very committed to the idea of the importance of
being a working woman, in terms of self identity and in terms of contributing to the family’s economic and social welfare.

She is critical about the role of media in present modern complex society. She points out that media continue to play a seminal role in shaping public attitudes and creating power elites. Although it purports to speak for all sections of society, in reality today’s mainstream media represents largely the interests of those in power and the sections that gain from the exercise of that power, both politically and socially. There are exceptions to this, of course, but this, she insists, is the general pattern.

Elaborating on the role of print and electronic media in present day context, she figures out that television, increasingly, is emerging as the primary source of news in India. It has the advantage of vaulting over the literacy divide and therefore can influence larger sections of the population that the print media cannot do. The print media, however, plays an important role in shaping opinion, since the opinion makers tend to use the print media as their frame of reference.

She recognizes the prioritization of issues on the basis of ‘hard news’ and ‘soft news.’ She goes on to add that ‘hard’ news is generally politics or corporate related, while ‘soft’ news generally deals with what are known as ‘human interest’ aspects. “Again, the divide seems to be related to power and the exercise of it thereof. The Indian media is believed to be among the most politics driven in the world. It was only in the late seventies and eighties that
this pattern changed somewhat, influenced by the social movements of the day, from feminism to environmentalism to social activism”. She adds.

She showed her sincere concern on the increasing influence of market in shaping media ideology. She pointed out that the nineties witnessed a paradigm shift coterminous with the restructuring of the Indian economy. The market began to increasingly determine news values and priorities. Advertisers began to be more assertive, sometimes succeeding in creating, out of specific newspapers and channels a ‘product’ in which to showcase their products. The Rupert Murdoch model of predatory pricing and total market control has been adopted by some newspapers in order to emerge as the biggest players. This has in turn affected the media’s heterogeneity and snuffed out several of the smaller players.

Talking extensively on media and women, she pointed out that the media has never been particularly gender sensitive partly because women were not an economic or social force to reckon with. The late seventies and eighties did see some changes fuelled by the rising tide of women’s activism. An issue like rape, for instance, earlier dismissed as another ordinary crime, was slowly perceived as an act of violation against the right of an individual to life and freedom of movement. Certain important landmarks, like the Supreme Court judgment on the Mathura Rape Case in the late seventies did influence thinking in general and thinking within the journalistic fraternity in particular. With nineties, this impulse seems to have petered out. Once again women began to
be treated as sexual icons, albeit with a superficial gloss of being independent and empowered.

Professional hazards faced by women journalists were acknowledged by her with sensitivity. She reflects, “Women journalists in the smaller towns and mofussil areas continue to face the hurdles like lack of safe transportation at night, job security and the like. Their counterparts in the bigger cities have, to some extent, have overcome these hurdles, thanks to restructuring in the media and the fact that there is now a critical mass of women professionals in this field. However, even in mainstream media the glass ceiling remains and women still find it difficult to rise to the very top of their organizations. When I joined as a journalist, women’s movement was at its high all over the world. We took advantage of that and emphasized on women’s issues and grew as a tribe. I remember when I was working with the ‘Eve’s Weekly, a group of us would take out special issues on women’s oppression such as rape, dowry or other forms of domestic violence. The marketing department would contest saying, ‘don’t expect us to sell the magazine with such kind of coverage’. We however would insist and though the magazine lost its readership to an extent, I am satisfied those issues could be brought to the forefront.”

Reflecting her own preference to write on human interest issues, she added as concluding remarks, “I think my own exposure to political activism, feminist activism and from that to social activism has shaped me considerably as a woman journalist. It has made me acutely conscious of social asymmetries and
exclusions and kept me sensitive to other areas where active discrimination is the norm, as for instance in the treatment of Dalits. This has also meant that I have been reluctant to leap on to the career bandwagon. (She also subtly mentions that there are many women journalists who prefer to write on the issues of their concern instead of being ambitious in leaping in the career graph).” Ambition, after all, means different things to different people.

4. SUJATA MADHOK: Freelancer par Excellence

Sujata Madhok is a freelance journalist and social activist with a strong commitment to the cause of women. She has varied experiences in the field of writing and has wide range of exposure to the national and international media as a journalist.

Sujata was born in 26th November, 1956 in a upper middle class, educated family in Delhi. After completing her graduation in English literature and a diploma in Indian Institute of Mass Communications, she started her career as a journalist with a small newspaper called Democratic World and served there for a year to begin with. In 1977, she moved to The Statesman as a sub editor. However, as The Statesman decided to move its main office to Calcutta, she lost her job. She joined The Hindusthan Times and worked there as a senior sub editor for a considerable period of time between 1979 and 1989. Her interest remained routed in giving importance to the human interest issues and she recognized it was not very well recognized in main stream newspaper. The most constructive period of her working life has been, she reflects, her role as
the Editor of *Women’s Features Service*, an agency specializing in gender and development issues (1989-2000). She was instrumental in developing international network of women journalists writing on development issues from a women’s perspective.

Sujata has edited and contributed to daily tabloids produced at a series of international conferences, including the Earth Summit at Rio de Janeiro in 1992, the International Conference on Population and Development at Cairo in 1994, the fourth World Conference on Women at Beijing in 1995, the Habitat Summit at Istanbul in 1996 and the World Food Summit at Rome in 1996. In 1997-98 she coordinated a 26 episode radio series on Women and the Law and an eight episode series on Women and Health for broadcast by All India Radio. She has also written a report on ‘Status of Women in Construction Industry’, for National Commission for Women.

Sujata has been an activist since her student days. As the president of Student Union, Miranda House, Delhi University, she responded to the women’s movement in India that was taking off in 1970s as a fall out of the women’s movement all over the world. She also critically responded to the emergency declared at that point of time as a responsible student. “It had an adverse impact on me career wise as I could not get an admission in Jawaharlal Nehru University because I was the President of my college and instead joined journalism.” She chuckled. However, women’s movement left an impact in her mind and she remained committed to the cause of women throughout. I am still

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active as a women’s right activist and fearlessly raise my voice against the ills of society.” she adds. Talking about familial response to her approach towards life she said, “Parents have been critical about my career and life choices but have never played a damaging role in terms of interference. However, my husband, who is also a journalist, has been very supportive throughout. Balancing family and work simultaneously would not have been easy otherwise.”

She was very articulate in voicing her views on the role of media in present day context. “Big Press, controlled by corporate interests and concentrated in the metropolitan cities is divorced from grass root realities. Human interest issues get marginal coverage in this framework. Elaborating on the way media prioritize issues, she said, “for long years newspapers were obsessed with reportage of politics and politicking. The senior most correspondents were assigned the plum jobs of covering the antics of the ruling party, while the next in the hierarchy got assigned the lesser political parties. Post 1991, the Pink Press, as the financial papers have come to be called, became predominant and business journalists suddenly acquired importance. The growing corporatization of the newspaper industry itself was reflected in the way the press began to cheer on the reforms. The media today continues to play a major role in creating a climate of public opinion that favours a whole range of policies that suit business, industry and small entrepreneurs within the middle class.” Focusing on its impact on the coverage of human interest issues she pointed out that in the euphoria of liberalization, the fall out of reforms on
various sectors of the economy, the stagnation of industry and setbacks to agriculture have been inadequately reported. Analysis of the impact on people’s livelihoods is sadly lacking. It is the role of the media to be skeptical and critic, not cheerleader for governments.

Reflecting on the role of media in covering women’s issues, she pointed out that the impact of women’s movement in 1970s forced the media to give extensive coverage to women’s issues. However, the media focused mainly on crime against women and the focus in the early years was on detailed, often sensational, sometimes voyeuristic coverage of violence. She added, “By the 1980s such crimes became clichés-rape, dowry deaths, sati et al were reported on in lurid detail on local pages and even the front page of daily newspapers. They were analysed extensively in edit pages, op-ed pages, features sections. Rape became a staple of the average Hindi film. The women victim who bears incredible sufferings and finally becomes transformed into a kali mata to avenge herself became another popular cinema stereotypes. And now the NGOs have taken up the issues quite vocally.” However, she admits that media has never played a responsible role in bringing these issues to center stage. Women’s issues have never achieved the deserved status in mainstream media.

In this context, she strongly feels the necessity of having an alternative media to focus on women’s issues. She pointed out that as the editor of Women’s Features Service, she played a responsible role in highlighting all development stories with a women’s perspective. She is convinced about the fact that
women need to be uplifted and their problems have to be addressed for the all round development of the society.

Sujata Madhok is presently working as a freelance journalist and believes that freelancing gives a lot of space to write what you sincerely wish to write.

5. MANIMALA: Activism as a Way of Life

Though women are increasingly participating in mass media with the changing time, vernacular print media is guilty of marginalizing women journalists in more than one ways. we still notice a negligible representation of women in the vernacular, especially in the Hindi heartland. Manimala, a well known journalist in Hindi media is definitely an exception and not the rule in this context. She has shown extreme courage and confidence by making her presence felt in a largely patriarchal culture. Her writings and reportage have shown a rare blend of investigation, insight and empathy.

Manimala was born in 16th November, 1957 in a small village called Ugna, Jharkhand (then Bihar). Her father was a public servant and mother was a house wife. She moved to Patna to pursue her education and stayed independently in a hostel. During her graduation she was deeply moved by the JP movement and actively participated in a student movement working for the land rights of the Dalit agricultural labourers. Since then, she has been actively involved in activism fighting for a just and fair society. She has a deep sense of belongingness to the poor and down trodden and committed to their cause.
She is presently working as the Head and Publisher (Hindi), *Book for Change*. She also runs her own feature service, *Shakti Features*, on the weaker sections of the society. Manimala has worked for *Prabhat Khabar*, Ranchi and *Navbharat Times*, New Delhi and covered various national and international conferences dealing with social and human interest issues. She has been editorial adviser for *Bachpan*, a monthly magazine on street children and *Hum Dalit*, a monthly magazine. She has also been consultant for a study on the impact of literacy for the National Literacy Mission Resource Centre. She has worked for the electronic media, written scripts for documentaries, presented news and coordinated discussions for AIR. Among the awards she has received are Chameli Devi Jain Award for Journalism, the Jan Jagaran Patrikarta Puraskar, Jaipur and the Social Journalism Award, Patna.

I met Manimala in her South Extension II “Book for Change” and as I shared lunch with her in a common table where all the office staff sat together, she effortlessly introduced me to her world of activism and her lifelong commitment to fight for the cause.

She contended when I asked her the reason for choosing journalism as a career, “I don’t perceive journalism as a career. I joined JP movement when I was a graduate student in Patna University as an activist. I fought for the Dalit agricultural labour and their right to land for a considerable period of my life as a student. That may be considered as the defining period of life which shaped my perspective about life. I started writing my experiences in my diary and sent
one such story to Janmang - a popular Hindi newspaper of India then. The narrative was published and the writing was so powerful that publishers from different newspapers requested me to write more on the issue. I flagged off my life as a journalist then onwards. And gradually I came to realize my writing skill may be utilized as a means to send the message across to the general mass.”

When asked about her family’s response to her perspective about life, she said, “I have been a very independent human being from the very childhood and believe in taking my own decisions in life. Family and surrounding have never interfered in my career or life in any ways. However, parents’ influence continues to inspire my value system at every crucial juncture of my life.” At the age of 47, she has chosen to lives in Delhi alone though closely in touch with her mother who lives back home in Jharkhand and siblings. “Ours have been a close knit family and we always stand by each other at the time of need.” she added.

She is critical about the functioning of media in a market driven society. “Media is getting increasingly commercialized with the changing time and it is leaving a very negative impact in the general mass. This is also a time when people are getting more and more dependant on media for information and entertainment because of its easy accessibility. We as journalists need to understand the gravity of the situation and responsibly act as the voice of the mass. The voice of the down trodden and the poor needs to be addressed with
utmost sincerity for the betterment of the society.” She is careful not to prioritize issues on the basis of its salability. “I am strongly against categorization of issues on this basis. Every issue needs to be addressed with utmost social concern. As journalists we must advocate the values of democracy. The journalists should write on issues that are close to their heart. However, I agree, commercialization of media in today’s society has hampered the quality of space given to the newspaper in qualitative and as well as quantitative term.”

She agrees that women’s issues don’t get its due coverage in the media, especially in vernacular media. “Our society is largely patriarchal and women’s status is accepted as ‘given’. The reason attributes to the largely patriarchal culture within which the society is being set up. Women’s issue definitely needs to be addressed for the betterment of the society.

She goes on to add, “Women are the disadvantaged lot in the society. They are often considered as the vulnerable lot. Though I have always succeeded in struggling for my right, most of the women are not as fortunate and lack moral courage.” Reflecting on one of her confrontations with discrimination of women on the basis of gender, she said, “When I wanted to become a reporter in the Prabhat Khabar, a leading newspaper in Bihar, the editor insisted that I take up a desk job. Reporter as a job was not perceived a woman’s job. I managed to get the job however, but I may be considered an exception and not the rule. Even today women in Hindi media are yet to find their place”.

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Exploitation of women on job front needs attention. "I must mention that one of the senior editors of the said newspaper had attempted to molest me during my young days. I did raise my voice against this issue and resigned saying the organization did not deserve me. However, the editor in chief took a bold step of terminating the said senior editor as a consequence. Not many women would opt to work in such climate."

Does being a woman play a deciding role in shaping her perspective in any ways? she would not agree. "I perceive myself as a sensitive human being. Discrimination on the basis of ascribed status is not acceptable to me. I don’t believe in concentrating my focus only on women’s issues. I strongly feel for all kind of oppression and continue to fight for the just cause. I don’t think my being a woman play any deciding role in shaping my perspective. I think had I been a man, I would have felt for the cause as sensitively as I am feeling now. The attempt has always been to be a good human being. Gender has no role to play in it."

And she chooses to remain an activist for the rest of her life.

6. ANITA KATYAL: Going Beyond Strictly Gender Issues

Anita Katyal is a well known journalist. She writes on wide range of issues and has vast exposure in the field of journalism. We had a lengthy conversation in her Gulmohar Park residence where she narrated her experiences as a responsible journalist in this field for more than two decades.
Anita was born in 8th July, 1958 in Delhi. Her father is a reputed journalists and he had a strong impact in her upbringing. "The conditioning from the very childhood was such that both of us (she and her sister who is presently working with Reuters) knew we are growing up to be journalists." She clarified. She joined as a trainee with The Times of India when she was still continuing her masters in sociology in Delhi School of sociology. She worked with the same newspaper till 2003 as a special correspondent and during her stay with the newspaper, has covered wide range of issues starting from politics, market to education, health and gender concerns.

She had a three month training programme at the International Institute for Journalism, Berlin, Germany as a part of the exposure and. Worked for six months with Gannett Group of newspapers in the USA as an Alfred Friendly Press Fellow. She has also participated and covered a range of international conferences, including the Cairo conference on population and development, Education for All Summit, the special UN session on Beijing Plus Five in New York. She was also a member of a special women's group, which visited Iraq to study the impact of sanctions on ordinary citizens. And she has also worked as the member of a study tour to South Africa and Uganda for on the spot assessment of HIV/AIDS epidemic. She is presently working as Special Correspondent with Chandigarh based daily, The Tribune.

"Family support has been crucial in deciding a career in journalism," points out Anita while asked about the role of parents in choosing a profession. And she is
fully committed to her work. "I am not a married person. Thus, I don’t have problems dealing with the pressing demand of the job which includes extensive traveling, erratic hours and night shifts. But definitely the job of a journalist is not an easy choice for married women with family responsibility. Our society has not become gender sensitive that way and domestic domain still remains the domain for women." She added.

When asked about the role of media in present day society, she pointed out that media have grown to have tremendous influence in contemporary times and its potentials should be utilized responsibly for the society. She agrees that media is highly driven by market interest but commented that it is not possible to ignore market in present day context a newspapers largely derive their revenues from the sponsorship. But market should not overpower media ideology.

Talking on the subject of women and media, she settled down to believe that women’s issues should not remain an exclusive domain for women journalists to cover. It is time men should also take interest in the subject and they need to be sensitized in this regard. Recalling her days with Times of India where she worked as a correspondent, she added that if there was any women’s conference or seminar on women’s issues the chief would send the letter to my table to cover the event. I used to always protest on this subject. I always feel men need to become more sensitive to women’s issues and empathize with their problems in order to build up a just and balanced society."
She however covers politics at present and loves her job. “I do not agree with the belief that women journalists should cover only women’s issues or human interest issues. They should cover the issues in whatever they are good at. In that way they can do justice to their work and their own self.” She added.

One of the founder members of the Indian Women’s Press Corps, Anita strongly believes that networking between women journalists needs to be emphasized in order to bring about solidarity among themselves. Organizing effort in addressing the issues definitely get noticed.

7. ADITI KAPOOR: Women Have Arrived

Aditi Kapoor is the new generation journalist who has achieved wide acclaim for her contribution to print media in contemporary times. Her writings strongly reflect her commitment to human-interest issues. She has reported extensively on corporate affairs, infrastructure, multilateral institutions, environment and the social sector. However, she strongly believes in giving a gender perspective to all the issues of social concern and makes a conscious effort to bring women’s issues to mainstream news.

Aditi was born in 31st December, 1962 in Delhi and was brought up to be journalist following her father’s footstep. After completing her masters in sociology from Delhi School of Economics she joined Times of India as a trainee and then was taken in by the organization in 1987. She continued to work for the same organization till 1998 initially as a reporter and got
promoted to be a Principal Correspondent. In 1998-99 she was awarded a Research Fellowship by Leadership for Environment and Development (LEAD) International, New York. During this period she contributed a fortnightly column, Blossoms in the Dust, to the Times of India on gender, environment and development.

Winner of the Statesman Award for Rural Reporting 1992, She received the CSE Journalism Fellowship in 1990. She has written two book length monographs and a number of papers on issues of gender, environment and development. Aditi works with UN agencies and with Self Employed Women’s Association (SEWA), Ahmedabad, on communication and development issues. She is on the Board of Directors of World Resources Institute, Washington DC, and was a member of LEAD-India National Steering Committee/Board from 1999-2001. She is a founding member of Alternative Futures, a Delhi based development research and communications group.

She is presently working as the Media and Advocacy Coordinator for Oxfam, New Delhi. I had an insightful discourse with Aditi in her East of Kailash residence.

When asked about her choice of career as journalism, she said, “Journalism has been a natural preference for me as far as career choice is concerned. My father is a well known journalist and I have been brought up in that culture. However, as I have grown in the profession, I have chosen my field of writing on the basis of the issues I have strongly felt for.” Support and encouragement from
family and surrounding play a deciding role in most of our lives. “I come from a privileged, metropolitan, educated family background and my parents have provided me with the best of education. There have never been any constraints as far as pursuing a career is concerned. I have been thoroughly encouraged by my parents, husband and surrounding at large for each of my endeavors.” And she recognizes the constraints of being a woman. “Balancing both family and work is a genuine constraint for every woman. I have been fortunate in this context as I live with my parents in laws who take care of the children. However, I have also been fortunate in work front as well. When my children were small and my husband was posted in Bombay, I wanted a transfer to the same city and was sanctioned that. I had a relatively less burdensome job there which helped me spend quality time with my kids.

Aditi belongs to the present generation. But she definitely is not the one to get swayed away by the present trend. She instead, chooses to weigh the potentialities and the limitations. “Media has tremendous potentialities in present day context. The mass is thoroughly intoxicated by the messages, imagery and symbols delivered by the medium because of the technology revolution. Media in both its form- print as well as electronic- need a face lift. Journalists should act responsibly at this juncture and use this space for the benefit of the larger society rather than selling sensational coverage.” She insists. When asked about her response to the way media prioritize issues on the basis of ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ she nods. “I must admit hierarchization of news on the basis of hard and soft issue is very much prevalent in the media industry
and hard political, corporate and business issues are given more priority to the human interest issues on the basis of market demand. However, I personally am strongly against delivering hard, factual stories in forms of news item. I have always put a conscious effort to give a social angel to all the issues I cover. For instance, when I was covering corporate affairs in Times of India (which is considered as hard news) I would deliberately talk about the importance of environmental concern in the said sector. Hard news with its facts and figures is easy to gather from organized sources and may be covered by all. Human-interest issues on the other hand need much more sensitivity, understanding, genuine concern and interpretive ability. I personally choose to give utmost importance to human-interest issues as a journalist. However, my attempt has been to bring human interest issues to mainstream journalism.

However, she has written extensively on women’s issues. She points out that woman’s issues do not get its due coverage by the media. Despite the liberal laws in our country, the society remains largely patriarchal and journalists also function within the same framework. Being a woman in this profession certainly demands some responsibilities. She strongly believes that if one wishes to bring about change, s/he needs to change from within. She adds, “I strongly feel being a sensitive woman gives me a perspective to cover issues from a gender angle. I can instinctively relate to women’s issues. During my extensive travel in the rural areas of the country as a reporter I have come across various experiences that have touched my heart. I empathize with the problems of the down trodden and sincerely feel that their dreams should be
realized. They have a right to live their dream as much as the privileged section of the society. As a responsible reporter I have always attempted to talk pronouncedly about the social cause in general and women and environment in particular. However, at this juncture, it becomes important to bring a linkage between all sections of the society.”

8. R. JAYASHREE PURI: Breaching a Male Bastion

R. Jayshree Puri is presently working as a cameraperson with the Doordarshan, New Delhi. She joined DD at a time when there were no women in this field and had to struggle hard to prove her worth and establish her credibility. She has never let her gender come on her way of success and has covered wide range of stories across the globe.

Jayshree was born on 18th December, 1962 in Chennai and moved to Delhi in 1970 with her family. After completing her education in Women’s polytechnic, Delhi and Pune Film Institute, she joined Doordarshan as a testing engineer in 1984. She has also done technical courses in DECU, ISRO and Reuters during the course of her career. She then got promoted to be the camera person and though since last eighteen years there have not been any promotion (blame the government setting) she is quite satisfied with her job because DD has given her a lot of scope to prove her as a established camera person. She is presently attached to the Prime Minister’s office and accompanies the Prime Minister in his political tours in India and abroad.
She lives in RK Puram, New Delhi with her husband and twin daughters Esha and Akankhsya and was interviewed at her apartment to get the insider's view.

Taking up a job of a camera person has not been an easy choice. “It was for the first time Doordarshan had advertised for a camera persona and welcomed women to apply for the job. I was looking for a job after getting my degree from Pune Film Institute and responded to the advertisement. I got a call letter for the interview. My parents were reluctant because the job of a camera person was perceived as a man’s job. I went for the interview anyways as my parents were convinced I would not get the job. But secretly I wanted to prove myself. And the interview was a challenge in real sense. Most of the questions were asked on the basis of my gender that perturbed me. However, I boldly faced the board and answered what I felt strongly. I realized I would not get the job because I am at the wrong side of the gender. I candidly challenged them saying women can very well prove themselves given a chance, but it’s high time the board realizes the biases against women and bring them to the forefront.” And she got an offer from Government of India to join as a testing engineer to her surprise. Family members were hesitant in the beginning. But she managed to convince them to take up the challenges. Her father, however, remained supportive throughout and encouraged her during her trying periods. Today, her husband and two children are her strongest support structure.

But managing both family and work has been the most difficult part as she would not agree to compromise on any. Her husband has a touring job and
most of the time she has to manage the household work after a hectic job schedule. But she has learnt to enjoy life and its challenges.

She strongly believes that the arrival of electronic media has brought a new dimension to society. News and information are no more the preserve of the educated few. Electronic media, with the way it delivers messages and images, is increasingly becoming the popular media of the general mass in a country like ours. However, she points out that the media should act responsibly at this juncture in order to safeguard the interest of the society. The role of a camera person as a mass media agent has to be unbiased, responsible and non judgmental with an eye for details. She is strongly against sensationalization of news for cheap popularity. “News should always focus on providing information. Images should be shown to substantiate the information. But sometimes news channels repeatedly show images of riots and accidents with gory details which may adversely impact the mind of the mass. Electronic media need to be sensitized in this context. She however recognizes that Doordashan has not yet freed itself from the clutches of the government and is guilty of patronizing the state and government which is its biggest demerit.

Being in this profession as the only women has been really challenging. I joined Doordashan at a time when it was the only channel functioning in India. And I was the first woman to join as a camera person. That was indeed a proving time for me. And I had to work really hard to establish myself professionally. I have consciously made an attempt never to let my gender
come in the way of my profession. If you want to prove yourself, you should not talk about your handicaps.”

However, she extensively talks about the hurdles of being a woman in a profession which is largely a male domain. “You have to work harder and run that extra mile to make the men around you realize you are as capable. But women have the responsibility of taking care of the family and the kids as well. After a hectic day’s work, I have to be home on time to cook dinner for my kids. And it has been maddening after a whole day’s work with a thirteen kilo camera on my back.” But she goes on to add, “I am satisfied as I have earned a respectable position and the desired credibility at job front. People have learnt to take me, and the women lot at large, seriously.” She concluded.