CHAPTER-II

Women’s Voices and the Print Media
The previous chapter has reflected on the theoretical framework that enables us to comprehend the complex relationship between women and mass media. At this juncture, it becomes important to concentrate on a more specific empirical locale and examine what exactly happens in a real site of the media. In this chapter the central focus is on the print media. Though the Hindusthan Times (English) has been taken as the sample newspaper, both English and Hindi newspapers have been consulted in order to get a comparative perspective. Before I reflect on the newspapers that have been studied, it is necessary to reflect on the relevance of print media in Indian context. Historically speaking, nationalist newspapers did play an extraordinarily important role in arousing the confidence of the colonialized people for participating in the struggle for decolonialization. Even in contemporary times newspapers are often endowed with high value for acting as a conscience or an agency to raise critical and dissenting voices. Newspapers are often read and talked about. There are different ways of consuming a newspaper. Any one who is familiar with rural landscape of the country would concede how a local, regional newspaper in a tea shop or in the saloon is widely read and talked about. Likewise, newspapers are read almost religiously by students, Political activists, educationists, social workers and ordinary people and it won't be wrong to say that even today printed words in a newspaper has some kind of
legitimation in the collective imagination. That is why this chapter acquires relevance.

**Issues to be covered in the chapter:** This chapter attempts to study in broad details 1. The print media’s response to women's question. 2. The nature and extent of women’s engagement with the newspaper industry and the role of women journalists in producing news materials especially news items on women’s issues.

The specific theme of the study would focus on the culture of (print) media industry; how issues are prioritized i.e. the concern of the newspapers to various issues; market and media; depiction of women’s issues and the changing trend over the years; involvement of women journalists with various issues and their role in covering news stories and influence on editorial policies, and finally a comparative analysis of the response of the English and the Hindi Press to women’s issues.

I

**The Hindustan Time: A Perspective**

*Profile of Hindusthan Times:* However, before beginning the analysis of the findings I would like to provide a historical sketch of the sample newspaper the Hindustan Times for a background reference.
The Hindustan Times, or HT as it is popularly called is the largest circulating English daily of Delhi, the capital city of India, keeping a close pace with the Times of India as its closest rivalry.

HT was inaugurated as a tabloid evening paper by Mahatma Gandhi on September 24, 1924 that carried articles by prominent personalities of pre-independent era like Motilal Nehru, Muhammed Ali Jinnah and Jawaharlal Nehru. A year later, the audited circulation was around 30 copies, and complimentary copies numbered 400. The paper was initiated as a part of the move by the Akalis, predominately Canadian Sikhs, to canvass support for the Gurudwara movement. Lahore, then the heart of Punjab, was initially selected as the base for the establishment of the newspaper, but then it was changed over to Amritsar as the former already had two strong dailies- the Tribune and The Civil and Military Gazette. However, Sardar K.M. Panikar, the editor, finalized its base to be in Delhi to “deal with national politics and not be a vehicle for communal interest.

In 1925, after the passage of the Gurudwara Act, Sikhs lost interest from the newspaper and the ownership was passed on to Madan Mohan Malaviya. In 1927 Ganshyam Das Birla took over the newspaper and thereafter the paper continues to run by the Birla Group. The newspaper however did not start as unabashedly pro-British unlike its other English counterparts and took up the national cause. In 1930, it stopped publication in protest against attempts to muzzle the press. The newspaper fought against the British atrocities and had
to be penalized more than once for its stand in the then national politics. Its symbolic link with the Congress during freedom movement changed into a cooperative relationship with the establishment after independence. However, the newspaper has been able to retain its status for taking bold stand whenever it finds fault in the government and has saved itself from degenerating into a ‘yes’ newspaper after independence. The credit may be thrust upon the strong set of editorial talents who served the newspaper subsequently which includes Jairam Daulatram Pothen Joseph, Devdas Gandhi, J.N. Sahni, Durga Das, S. Mulguonkar, B.G.Vrghese and Khuswant Singh. And the present editor of the newspaper is Vir Sanghvi.46

It may be noted that the Hindusthan Times is one of the leading National English daily with more than fifteen hundred employees working for the Delhi edition. The circulation of the newspaper is 10 lakhs 66 thousand copies per day. Besides its Delhi edition the newspaper has seven more editions circulated in some of the leading and politically active cities of India like Patna, Calcutta, Lucknow, Chandigarh, Raipur and Ranchi.

II

Seeing Beneath Printed Words

A sociological reading of a newspaper invariably implies a study of its content-what it publishes and what it does not; how it defines news; chooses and selects

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46 The information on the historical profile of the Hindusthan Times was collected from the archives of HT On Line for reference.
important events from un important ones; its priorities and preferences. As a matter of fact, our sociological imagination tells us that news or reports are not just hard, objective facts. All these facts that are eventually chosen are situated in social, political context. That is why; a sociological engagement demands that the newspaper contents are located in a socio-political context. Then it becomes possible to see beneath news and discover the sociology in it. An example may be cited in this regard. When a newspaper repeatedly gives the headline regarding the rape of a woman, it is important for a sociologist to examine how this news is being projected. It is possible that the newspaper writes this report with high degree of concern and seeks to arouse the conscience of its readers so that collectively we can stand up against such violence. But there are also possibilities that the newspaper writes the same fact with a high degree of sensationality, suspense and melodrama and as a result further intensify the image of a woman as a piece of sexual consumption. In such a scenario, reports of this kind stimulate collective gossip and vicarious pleasure. That is why facts are not just facts. News are not just news. For a sociologist it is important how these are mentioned, presented and packaged. In other words, a critical content analysis becomes absolutely essential for a study of this kind.

Content analysis of three consecutive years (between 1999 and 2001) intends to explore in great details the coverage of women's news/issues in the English Press, the nature of coverage in terms of presentation and the importance given to women's issues by the Press. The broad concern of the investigation in this
analysis is to find out how women and their issues are being depicted in these news items in a modern, liberalized, corporate media set up and its implication in present day context.

All the newspaper clippings on women’s issues of last three years (between 1999 and 2001) were consulted for the purpose of coding and analysis. Various types of stories/items identified in the data were news stories, articles, columns, reviews, editorials, lead stories, new analysis and so on.

For the purpose of analysis the issues to be discussed are branched into different sections (as projected in the tables) such as atrocity against women, empowerment of women, women and development, women and law, profile of women and the rest of the issues which does not fall under the above categories are termed as ‘others’. I have attempted to analyse and discuss the news items under two broad sub-heading:

- News coverage of women’s issues
- Non-news coverage of women’s issues.

The Hindustan Times is one of the leading and most popular English newspapers in Delhi. The tables below discuss in some detail the way women’s issues are handled by the said newspaper.
The above table attempts to quantify the total number of news items covered by the newspaper. The analysis of the data presented is as follows.

Out of 291 news items that were studies in 1999, 245 news stories were on atrocity against women which is a significantly largest percentage of the total data (i.e. 84.19%); 10.99% was on women empowerment; 2.4% was on women and development; 1.37% was on women and law; no news stories of profile of women; and 1.03% come under 'others' category.

In 2000, a total of 297 news items were covered for analysis out of which 86.53% were on 'atrocity against women'; 10.77% were on 'women empowerment'; 2.02% stories talk about 'women and development'; 0.67% were on 'women and law'; no stories were found under ‘profiles of women’ and ‘others’ category.

Similarly, in 2001, a total of 186 news items were covered for analysis out of which 84.94% were on atrocity against women; 9.13% were on women empowerment; 2.15% stories talk about women and development; 3.22% were
on women and law; no stories on profiles of women; and 0.53% fall under ‘others’ category.

The quantitative analysis of the above data shows that the largest numbers of news stories generally covered by the newspaper are on ‘atrocity against women’. However, table no. 3 and the subsequent analysis speak in details how different category of discriminations are handled by the media; percentage and nature of the stories and the involvement of the media with the concerned stories.

The second most significant issue covered by media has been the empowerment of women. But an in depth study of these stories suggest that these stories deal mostly with what the officials or patrons say or do, the theme of the seminars or protests and the proceedings of the parliament. It has been observed that during Parliament session (March, August and December) the newspapers would be flooded with news coverage on empowerment (basically the opinions and protests of politicians). It may be pointed out that the study period of analysis fall between a crucial time frame when the Women’s Reservation Bill was tabled, debated and failed in the Parliament several times. Some of the examples may be:

- *NCW Cells meet (26th May, 1999)*
- *PM urges Parties to pass Women’s Quota Bill (8th March, 2000)*
- *Quota Bill: women MPs lead march to Parliament (11th August, 2000)*
Women's development (health, economic, education and cultural) have often been noticed as a neglected area of coverage with the Press though from a feminist point of view this is the most crucial issue that needs to be dealt with. However, the scanty and factual presentation of these news items poses a question of media's lack of concern for women's cause. The news stories falling under this category generally talk on the role played by the government, NGOs and other organizations on developmental issues.

A large number of legislative Acts have been enacted to protect the rights of women. Women related laws and their amendments are generally covered as factual, event centred reporting and sometimes they are dealt with in an analytical manner. Reports on legal aspects of women related stories however get very little space in the hard news section.

Profiles of important and successful women are also a visible content that may be included in women's issues. Anything else falling apart from these broad categorization are slided into 'others' category in the analysis.

Non-News Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HT</th>
<th>Atrocity/ discrimination against women</th>
<th>Women empowerment</th>
<th>Women and development</th>
<th>Women and law</th>
<th>Profile of women</th>
<th>others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>7+3(edit)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>30+1(D-edit)+3(R-edit)</td>
<td>15+2(edit)</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>13+1(R-edit)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Non-news coverage of Women's issues: Generally it is seen that certain background factors are ignored in the routine news. Later, some of these news items are presented in the form of features, human-interest stories, new analysis and editorial opinion. In the present analysis, I have mostly dealt with the articles and editorials that give women's issue a coverage. Interviews and columns are also dealt with in some details.

An article generally carries analysis of an issue and a thought provoking debate. At a micro level various issues are dealt with ranging from equality/status of women, legal rights, women's empowerment, to dowry, domestic violence, sati, problems of widows etc. However, these issues formed a very low percentage of the data. Many issues like property rights, personal laws, undemocratic population policies, health, development policies, female feticide and infanticide, prostitution etc. were either missing or have got negligible coverage.

The next category which debated women's problems in terms of issues was editorials. Editorials are the most important item in any newspaper. They convey the importance of an issue, bring it to the attention of the public and policy makers. And it is found out that women's issues are covered in editorials only but rarely. The most focused issue has been women's empowerment(read Women's Reservation Bill). However, editorials do cover issues when some events that violate women's cause catches the headline. Otherwise the general trend is that women's issues get a back seat in normal circumstances.
Newspapers also carry columns that deal with women’s issues and interviews with women’s rights activists are also carried out in infrequent intervals.

**News Items**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>HT</th>
<th>Rape</th>
<th>Dowry</th>
<th>Prostitution</th>
<th>others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
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<td>175</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As has been shown in the previous tables, atrocity against women is the most widely covered issue by the newspaper under study. Thus, the above table discusses the specific details of the said issue.

Atrocity/violence against women has been a major focus of feminist agenda and the importance given by media to these stories as a dominant theme may be simplistically analysed as catering to that need. But the observation of the micro themes of these news items revel that they are mostly event oriented stories which were not analytical by nature. They are based on factual reporting and mostly the data is gathered from the standard sources (like police officials, hospitals, courts or agencies). In rare instances the reporter would go beyond the sources and analyse the issue with a perspective. Thus, these stories easily fit into the media’s routinization and require less effort and expertise. And on the process, the feminist struggle to highlight women’s cause as a matter of serious concern gets lost somewhere. The campaign against rape, for instance, is generally regarded as the catalyst, which sparked off the contemporary
women’s movement in India. However, media’s role in depicting this issue as a women’s issue does not show a serious concern. The news stories are generally pegged as one or two columns crime stories, and involvement with the actual issue is generally superfluous. To set few examples of the frequently presented format of such news stories:

- woman gang raped in Sarai Rohila, 1 held. (HT; 1st Jan’99)
- 4 held in Nihan village gang rape and double murder (HT; 26th June ’99)
- 10 year old raped in W. Delhi (HT; 3rd May ’00)
- Police yet to nab gang rape accused (HT; 2nd Sept ’01)

I may add that from my previous interaction with the journalists it has been confided that these beats are generally covered by the freshers and they are expected to collect the data from these known sources as they are given and produce it in the desk. It was also pointed out that sometimes even if an individual reporter finds some data that contradicts the source, there is a fear of loosing that source which debar the journalists from disclosing those facts, and apart from that one has to be answerable to those individual findings and risk taking is not common with fresh reporters of this present day competitive, professional functioning of media world where in order to survive one has to ‘accommodate’. However, it is not to deny that there is no investigation of these issues by media. Investigative journalism is in fact an important ingredient of today’s media functioning. But mostly the follow ups and in depth stories found in the data deals with sensational issues rather than showing
any kind of genuine concern for the issues. Some of the important cases that were steadily followed up by the media were Anjana Mishra rape case, Priyadarsini Matto murder case, Jesica Lal murder case, the suicide case of Natasha Singh etc. That only confirms the input given by one of my respondents, 'a rape case in Gulmohar Enclave will get a front page coverage where as a rape in slum would be delineated into the city page one column material and sometimes used as filler materials.' It may be said that these cater more to sensationalization of the news for the purpose of greater marketability rather than any greater cause. It must also be pointed out that the cases that get front page coverage in the name of women’s cause highlight more on the people and their crimes rather than the issues themselves. For instance, Anjana Mishra follow up case stories highlights more on how the government and the political leadership could be managed to be toppled because of this incident rather than the agony of the woman involved and its impact on the psyche of the women in general. Similarly Natasha Singh suicide case highlighted mostly on from the family she comes from with detailed profiles rather than the family violence and its implications in social context. This kind of selective focus on women’s issues adversely impact the kind of coverage these issues deserve in a newspaper.

Similarly, dowry is an issue that is frequently read about in newspaper column. However, it is noticed that all news related to dowry is on deaths or attempts on life of women for the sake of dowry. There is no report at all on women who are suffering from dowry harassment. The reports are generally produced only
after the crime is committed as a factual crime report. Some of the examples may be cited below.

- Woman burnt to death for dowry. (14th Aug. '99)
- Dowry crime: husband awarded life term for burning pregnant wife. (23rd Aug. '00)
- Two dowry deaths reported from Noida (24th July, 01)

Prostitution as yet another form of crime on women gets a significant coverage by the HT. Though otherwise a neglected area of attention, prostitution as violence against women and prostitution and women's rights is found out to be a matter of grave concern (in relative terms) for the journalists. Though quantitatively speaking the issue has not got a substantial coverage, unlike other women's issues that are being criticized for its frivolous and factual reporting the former may be earmarked for having a sensitive angel to it. The problems of Devdasis, for instance, has been found out to have got an insightful coverage in the newspaper clippings under study.

Non-News Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HT</th>
<th>Rape</th>
<th>Dowry</th>
<th>Prostitution</th>
<th>others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>8+3(edit)</td>
<td>1+1(edit)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16+1(edit)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1+</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It must be pointed out that though quantitatively atrocities on women achieve the most significant coverage among women's issues, they are mostly factual
reporting without much of insight into the issue. A close scrutiny into the non
news items on this issue reveal that a very marginal percentage of the entire data
discusses and analyzes the issue in some depth.

As is shown in the above table out of a total of 181 rape issues identified in the
newspapers under study in 1999, only 6 items (i.e.3.31%) provide an in depth
analysis of the issue. Similarly, in the year 2000, 5.88% of the entire data
provides analysis on the issue. And in 2001, 5.75% of the total data were non-
news stories.

Stories on dowry also give a similar picture. In 1999, out of 49 stories on
dowry, none (i.e. 0% ) could be categorized under non-news items. In 2000,
4.08% of the entire data gives an insightful analysis to the issue. And in year
2001, 3.44% categorized under non-news stories.

However, as has been pointed out above, prostitution as a women’s issue
manages to get some insightful coverage by the newspaper though
quantitatively, the stories on this issue are quite less. In 1999, for instance, 28
stories were covered on prostitution out of which 7 (i.e.33.3%) were non-news
items. In the years 2000 and 2001 though, the percentage declined
considerably, which were 7.14% and 2.63% respectively.

In the year 1999, non-news items codified under the other stories on women’s
issues was 36.84%. In 2000, it was 66%, and in the year 2001, it was 35.29%.
In order to understand the marginal importance women’s issues get in the newspaper, it is important to point out as well that out of approximately 317 editorial columns published in the said newspaper every year, there was not even one single columns covering women’s issues in the years 1999 and 2001. In the year 2000 however, there were five editorials on the said issue, which is significantly marginal.

As it has been observed, rape, dowry and prostitution are news, and newspapers portray these news- at times as a typical police file, a law and order problem, and at times as a sensational story arousing gossip and pleasure. And only occasionally it is projected as a socially sensitive narrative as a language of conscience and dissent. Likewise there are editorials that do reflect on issues ranging from women’s participation in legislative bodies to different forms of patriarchal violence. As it has already been indicated sociologically it is important to examine how these news coverage or editorial comments situate women in the context of the prevalent patriarchal, hierarchical culture. Possibly newspapers have to become more sensitive and to borrow an existentialist idiom, more authentic to see women’s issues as human issues. Only then it is possible to rescue news about women from being reduced into object of public gossip, sensationalism and male pleasure. It requires a high degree of empathy, an elevated political consciousness and alternative culture of media and an immense state of feminist sensibility. For quite sometime the newspapers like other public bodies was a male forum. But with the changing times, things are supposedly changing. Women are entering into the media. Are they changing
the culture? Are they aware of the present form news packaging and politics? Are they critical of the gendered connotation of crime news and reports? These are important which need to be examined at this juncture.

III

Women as Insiders: Are Things Changing?

The overwhelming presence of women in the Hindusthan Times set up would prove the writings of the eighties wrong where visibility (or lack of it) of women in the production of news items was considered a set back for women's issues not getting coverage in the newspapers. However, despite more and more women making an entry into the profession, the expectation to give women's issue its due space in the paper is still a long way to go. An informal discourse with 25 women journalists in the set up may be considered insufficient to conclude anything about the changing scenario of the media industry and the changing media culture of Delhi, but it definitely introduces me to a new perspective to begin with. The following brief up of the field insight is based on my somewhat informal and unstructured discourse with the women journalists engaged with the production of news items in the media industry.

However, I must point out that though women are increasingly participating in the English press the statistics shows that women are still under represented as far as the male female ratio is concerned. In the Hindusthan Times, as has been
found out, out of 147 journalists in the editorial, the male female ratio is 101:46. And in the important positions (such as senior assistant editor, assistant editor, senior features editor, features editor, joint news editor etc.) the number of women professionals present are 11. (the data is collected as a part of my fieldwork)

The following summary also incorporates the views of some other journalists interviewed in the process of building up rapport with the media industry- the inputs, which I find extremely helpful in giving me a new insight.

**Background Profile**

All the women interviewed for the purpose of my study comes from a higher middle class educated back ground (in most cases both the parents working) and have faced little resistance while making a career choice. Out of 25 respondents 6 are married and 2 with kids.

The educational background revels that most of the respondents are graduates or post graduates in English literature without any formal degree on Mass Communication or social sciences. Most of them (barring two) are with public school background and would point out that it the family back ground rather than the education that plays a vital role in letting them pursue the career of their choice. As Poornima, a senior correspondent points out, “I have done my schooling from a government school unlike other professionals one

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47 Poornima Joshi is the Principal Correspondent of HT Sunday Desk, and was interviewed on 22nd February, 2002.
encounters in the organization and am aware of the fact that most of my school mates have not gone beyond school to pursue further studies, leave aside pursuing a career.” She even knows of her classmates who wash dishes back home. “It is not the education but my family background, which has given me the backing to reach where I am today. I come from a higher middle class educated background where my parents would understand the need to give their children the freedom of choice. Our education system independently does not provide any scope in pursuing a career.” She criticizes the politics of education.

Sony⁴⁸ gives full credit to her parents who have stood by her throughout and have given her all possible opportunities to prove herself. She points out that her mother takes care of all the household work and let her concentrate fully on the career because she understands the dynamics of today’s competitive job market and wants her children not to stay behind. Sweta⁴⁹ figures out that she has never felt discriminated at home because she is a girl child though the society outside has never been so kind. Priyanka⁵⁰ would get all support from family members to excel in her career. However, not all have been as fortunate in getting that kind of support structure. Seema⁵¹ would reflect, she had a very protective child hood since she is the only child of her parents. She recalls

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⁴⁸ Sony Sngwan is the Chief Reporter with HT and leads the Local Reporting Team of HT City, and was interviewed on 28th February, 2002.
⁴⁹ Sweta Rajpal is a sub-editor with the Local Reporting Team, HT City, and was interviewed on 24th April, 2002.
⁵⁰ Priyanka Dhanrajan is a Trainee in Local Reporting Team, HT City, and was interviewed on 15th April.
⁵¹ Seema Kumar is the Chief Sub-Editor, Sunday Magazine, HT, and was interviewed on 11th March, 2002.
when she started going to college she would tie along her plans with one of her seniors who used to live in the neighbourhood. She even cites instances when she would not go to college if her friend for some reason or the other does not go. She was dead scared of traveling alone or doing anything independently. But with time she decided to open up and become independent. She fought all by herself to break that personality trait of hers and she claims herself to be a self-made person. Till today her parents are protective about her (even if she is married and with a kid) and she has to inform her parents if she gets late or gets held up for some reason or the other. However, she understands their concern but she is happy despite the background she has been able to become independent as an individual. She gives all the credit to her husband who has been stood by her all the time. He has been very supportive and encourages her in doing well in the career. Even she recalls incidents where she would wish to give up career for family pressure or for the child but he is the one who would discourage her from doing so and would suggest, instead you take a break or go on a holiday but don’t quit because you will not like to stay at home and do these mundane work after a point of time. He also helps her in the entire household work. They live in a joint family with her in laws and they are also very understanding. She agrees that if one does not get this kind of support from her husband it is difficult for a woman to go ahead with a career and keep the family together. Family support is considered to be the most significant contribution in pursuing women with their career. Some of them apprehend, after marriage if things do not work in favour of their career, they might as well
leave the job and settle for a less demanding career. Despite the changing scenario and liberated background most of them would readily sacrifice their career for the sake of their family responsibility as it is largely perceived that women should attach their first priority to the family rather than the career.

Self Perception

Though the background profile of the women professionals revel that all of them come from well educated, progressive family background which is conducive for the profession they are in, it may also be acknowledged that women journalists by and large perceive the role conflict they encounter as women, as women journalist and a journalists separately which draws a clear distinction between the multiple roles in their family and work sphere in different manner irrespective of their privileged class and education background.

Family responsibilities often overlap the job responsibility of the women journalists, which is acknowledged by the respondents. Most of the journalists interviewed are unmarried and those who are married claim to have a supportive family background without which they could not have coped up really. The recognition that women’s household responsibility is much larger than that of men is a well-acknowledged fact among the otherwise liberated women lot in the organization. The fact that most of the women working in the organization are young and unmarried and some of them are contemplating to leave the job after marriage may provide some proof as well. Marriage never
came in between her work. As is quoted by Anita, "I don’t think my husband would even bat an eye lid if I go out at odd hours in connection with work.” She gives all the credit to her upbringing and education that has never made her feel discriminated against. The ladder to success would not have been easier without a positive nod from the family they come from. Most of the respondents agree. As to quote Aruna, "I am not an ambitious person career wise and is in the profession because it supplements to my family income.” This added income does lead some of the women to enter into the profession where a lack of involvement for the job is clearly indicated among the journalists who are working to supplement their family income. If a need arise, she would be willing to sacrifice her job for the sake of her family responsibility.” However, not all of them would agree. Apprehending the chances of the family responsibilities coming in between her work, Sony would make it clear from the very beginning that she is going to be very categorical while making a choice for her life partner. She would choose a person who would be supportive and would understand her need to stick to this profession. She points out that most of her adult formative period has been spent in this profession. It is not a matter of job but an entire way of life she has got used to. She does not see any reason why she would sacrifice this for sake of some family responsibility. She rather is a career minded woman. However some of the respondents would choose to sacrifice the career if confronted with adverse

52 Anita Kanungo is the Principal Correspondent with the Hindustan Times, and was interviewed on 23rd November, 2001.
53 Aruna P. Sharma is a reporter with HT, and was interviewed on 11th March, 2002.
situation. As to quote Vijaya,54 "One has to make a choice somewhere. If one intends to concentrate on her career fully then the family will go to pieces that is something I would not like it to be. Here comes the question of priority. And my first priority will definitely be my family, and then comes the job. No matter how competent one is in her job front given the kind of the societal set up we are in. in our society it is the most practical kind of choice a woman can actually make. We definitely will try to make our family understand, see this is the situation that requires some kind of arrangement. But even today our society would not respond to it in a positive manner. it is not that this is not happening but I would say, even in our generation the equation is 70-30%. It is important to be realistic. We can't change the set up over night. As I have already said, it is going to be real slow process." Abantiaka 55 agrees. She comes from a middle class educated family- her father is an advocate and mother is a lecturer in one of the colleges of Delhi University. Born and brought up and educated in Delhi she finds the Delhi culture conducive enough for women to work and she would love to stay economically independent. ‘What is the point of getting education in the best of schools and colleges if you don’t make yourself financially independent’, she would argue. However, she hesitantly admits that it depends on the circumstances after marriage, which would enable her to work or remain as a housewife. She strongly feels that women have greater responsibility to keep a home intact and

54 Vijaya Sharma is a sub editor with HT- on -line, and was interviewed on 22nd January, 2002.
55 Abantika Gupta is the Content Developer-News with HT, and was interviewed on 22nd January, 2002.
when it comes to sacrifices it is the woman who should do it. Journalism as a profession is perceived as demanding but interesting and she thinks after marriage it will be a bit difficult to pursue with this kind of a career. What troubles her most is the erratic hours and running around that is involved in the job. But she would love to stay in touch with writing and do free lancing in future given an opportunity. She finds this profession suitable to those who are unmarried and don't have family responsibility or those in a joint family set up. Anita attempts to empathize, "well, I do understand. If I see it from a more general perspective, there are women who are working in this place who would choose to do more of clerical work (even if they have the talent), go back home early and demand a systematic working hour because they have their own set of family constraints and family is really demanding. I am not quite capable to put myself in their shoes and understand their problem. But I am aware of the presence of such cases in massive scale in our industry." Anita Saluja argues, "...That's why I am not married. There comes a time in life you have to decide your priority. And my priority was my career. I decided against marriage because I thought I won't be able to do justice to both the things at a time. And I decided against marriage. I am totally committed to my career. And that way I have an 'added' advantage. I don't have that so called family burden, and can concentrate totally on my profession. For others it may not be the case and most of the women I am sure would give marriage and family the first priority but for me my career was important. Thus, I chose not to marry. This is

Anita Saluja is a senior reporter with Indian Express, and was interviewed in INS building on 2nd December, 2001.
definitely a profession that demands peculiar hours/timings. In the morning you may get late, its flexible, but it requires late hours of work. From evening onwards news/stories start pouring in and depending on what all are you covering you have to gather more and more information and work on it till late in the night till you file your story and send it for the newspaper. That means you have to hang around with this till 11-12 o’clock in the night and this kind of timing is definitely not going in favour of women with family esp. children. Then you are stressed mentally, and under stress you won’t be able to produce quality stuff. I felt family will come in the way, but then, that is my individual perception. Others might not share my view point.”

However, in the work front, the scenario is differently perceived by the respondents. By and large all of them agree, it is the organization one working with which determines the status of the professional in many ways and the advantages and limitations are largely determined by one's organizational background. Women journalists who have already worked in smaller set ups before joining HT points out that there is a significant difference between their previous organizations and the present ones in terms of status, prestige and constraints. Vijaya remarks, “when I was working with an independent news channel ‘First Serve’ it was not easy to get access to people working in the higher level and they would just snub you off. And being a woman, the constraints were also more blatant. It is a general perception that women in the profession would do anything to get the information and some them do try to make an advantage of it. And if you come from a smaller organization, they
would be more blunt in getting fresh with you. But if you come from a renowned organization like HT, they would not dare to act the way they do with others. Any way, everybody understands the power of media and women professionals working in this field may utilize it to their advantage.” HT has established its status as one of the leading National Dailies of India and the largest selling daily of the Northern reason (Delhi in particular). With such a reputation to its credit, it gives the journalists working in this set up the opportunity to access the sources at the highest level without much difficulties. The organization is also perceived by most of the respondents to be quite gender neutral, if not gender sensitive. “If you have the competence and sincerity, there is no reason one would held up from getting a promotion because she is a woman.” Clarifies Sony Sangwan, the Chief of Bureau, local reporting team, who has recently been promoted to the post she is holding. However, she reflects, “I in fact started my career with a relatively smaller organization (The Pioneer), and there is an advantage being in the smaller organization in your initial stage because you get to handle some important stories all by yourself and if you have the talent and competence you get noticed easily. That does not happen as easily in a broader structure.” The infrastructural facilities in terms of providing conveyance to the professionals to get back home after 11 o’ clock in the night provided by the organization is one of the major advantages in favour of women professionals though the facility is available for both men and women.
There was a sense of discomfort among the respondents and responses varied while encountered with the question whether increasing visibility of women in this profession makes any difference in tackling women’s issues. Though it is agreed upon that there is no serious engagement by media in general and women working in it in particular to cover women’s issue, it is acknowledged that women’s presence in the media set up has definitely changed the attitude of the industry (esp. men) towards women’s issues. As Reema⁵⁷ would put it, “The presence of women in large scale in the media industry definitely helps in situation. Like in our kind of a set up (the local reporting team consists of 13 reporters out of which 7 are women and the team is headed by a woman) a man can not get away with making a degrading remark on women most of the time it so happens that if there is a case of rape or molestation the reaction from the men’s side would be ‘kya patta, hua ki nehin’ and in our presence they would think twice before passing such sweeping statement. We would definitely insist, no women would like to protest against such kind of an issue if it is not at its extreme Or dowry cases, sometimes they would say, the case is a false case. May be they had a fight but she forced the case on her husband to get some money out of it. But we being women would definitely insist on saying it is upto the investigator to find out, you publish it first, knowing fully well there are false cases, there are false accusation at times. But these are rare. Being women we definitely relate more to women. After all we are women, may be in somewhat a privileged position, but we definitely are able to connect to women’s issues. It is a different matter if somebody wishes to overlook. Thus, I

⁵⁷ Reema Nagarajan is the Senior Reporter with HT, and was interviewed on 11th November, 2001.
must insist there is greater strength in coming together but it does not happen for some reason or the other. And may be we don't attach much importance to it.” Sony would add, while answering to a question on why even there is more and more women coming in this profession, women's issues are not getting its due coverage she would be quick to add, number of women in this profession is not going to solve this situation. She would not agree being a woman is the only criteria which make one identify with other women’s problem. Most of the women who join this profession come from privileged back ground and it is not easy to understand the problems of women in the slum, their living standard, their set of problems. If women write stories on women, it is because they think being women and being in privileged position they might as well do something for the not so privileged lot.

During my discourse with the journalists, it was also found out that against the past trend of women covering only women's issues that comes within the purview of soft issues, women journalists of recent years has broken the barrier and “cover all kind of issues traditionally under the domain of the male journalists. Women cover all kind of issues these days, ranging from politics, business, crime to health, education, human rights. Kadambini Murli58, one of the senior correspondents of HT takes keen interest in covering sports, an area women would not have thought of venturing upon, two decades ago. Women in the profession no more connect themselves much with women’s issues and as

58 Kadambini Murli is one of the Principal Correspondent with HT, and was interviewed on 27th September, 2001.
pointed out by Reema, "it is not the number of women but the quality of
women that determines the commitment to the issue." To quote Usha Rai\textsuperscript{59}, "when I started our career, all the women were committed to the women's cause. And there was a sense of commitment to give women's issues a space. The fact that women's issues are getting acknowledgment in a newspaper owes its credit to the long years of struggle. Women journalists in eighties and early nineties were collectively working towards this cause." However, Kalyani Sarkar\textsuperscript{60} clarifies, "it is important to understand the context in which the women journalists of that period were writing. At that time women's movement was at its pick and their stories had a backing of this movement. But today feminists have already made a space for themselves and it is no more topical to write on women's issues at this point. But I am sure issues like rape, dowry, reproductive rights etc. are getting their due place in the newspaper these days, whenever there is a issue, it gets the coverage. It no more is overlooked." However, some of the women journalists prefer to instantiate themselves from any kind of involvement with any issue in general and women's issues in particular. As Bibha,\textsuperscript{61} points out, women's issues has never disturbed her particularly because it ought to disturb her as she is a women. She makes it clear that she is a very individualist kind of person and would not do something because it should be done. She however shares her experiences about her visit to the slums where sex workers live and was amazed to see the

\textsuperscript{59}Usha Rai is the President PII, and vice president of IWPC and was interviewed during the course of my field work for insight.

\textsuperscript{60}Kalyani Sarkar is a free lance journalist, and her remarks were encountered during a discourse with few of the journalists in IWPC dining hall.

\textsuperscript{61}Bhibha Sharma is a senior Reporter with HT, and was interviewed on 21\textsuperscript{st} February, 2002.
way they live their lives in those stingy semi darkened jhupris without much of electricity or drinking water facilities. In the course of her due assignment to cover crime she has visited these places two or three times and what moved her the most was that girls of 13-14 years old engaged in this business because they don’t have any choice and literally are being raped. Another factor, which must be highlighted, is that they are engaged with unsafe sex that might cost their life. But we don’t peg it as news but report how the raid was done and where. The NGOs engaged in this profession are also frauds eating away money and claiming big things. Its all big talks. At the end of it, it boils down to one point. Every body is interested in his/her own business. But one can definitely talk all politically correct things and maintain this double standard. If one really wants to know exactly what this media industry is, I would call it a networking of professionals with ‘mediocre’ ideologies. Nobody is concerned about bringing about changes in the society.” Tulika 62 points out that being a woman she has not done much to highlight the issue in her professional level. But contemplate to write some insightful stories on women in IT industry specifically in Indian context. It is a well acknowledged fact that there are very less number of women working in the IT industry and even lesser in the higher or decision making position. It is applicable to the Indian scenario as well and she would do a bit of research on it to find out what are the specific problems of Indian women and highlight the issue. She agrees that presence of women in every profession is lesser in comparison to men which is a matter of concern

62 Tulika Bhatnagar is the Assistant Editor/Technical Writer for HT On Line, and was interviewed on 7th January, 2002.
and believes that the first step to women's emancipation is to get the right kind of education and be economically independent.” Clarifying her stand on covering women's issues Anita adds, “I think any sensitive person would give a gender perspective to any issue. But I have never consciously done that kind of a story. At least I don’t remember ever consciously writing a story because I am a woman.” answering the obvious question, being a woman, is not it obvious for a women to respond to women's cause in a more empathetic manner she points out, “see, this is a question of attitude. But I don’t think I should be consciously outraged because I am a woman. The role of the reporter here is to give an objective perspective to what ever is happening.” However, she does acknowledge the fact that it is not easy to take an objective stand as far as social issues are concerned and reflects, “may be because the way I have been brought up makes a difference. I have never been treated differently because I am a woman. Others may have different story to tell, but I have never consciously felt the difference being a woman. And I have never reported an issue intentionally giving it a women’s perspective.” And Vijaya has a different story to tell. She admits that the problems of women as a disadvantaged category is such a normal thing in the society that one tends to overlook it as a issue. But it is perceived by her as a matter of grave concern. “See, one can’t bring about a drastic change to these kind of circumstances esp. when they are so deeply rooted in our kind of structure and it will be dishonest on my part to say that I would like to take up these issues and bring about a radical change in the society. My approach to this would be- a slow but steady process.” She
points out that though there is no serious involvement by the media to take up women’s issues, the newspapers have started creating exclusive pages for women, like in HT we have a section called Persona, it may be for commercial purposes. What I intend to say is that there is a section exclusively for women. And that can be utilized for the purpose. See, these kind of spaces were nowhere in the horizon. Now they have managed to create a space. And it is up to us to give it a shape. Now we have a separate platform where we can put our voice. Now at least we can’t say that we don’t have a forum where we can put our views. This acknowledgment is a basic achievement if one perceives it that way. And we can really utilize that kind of an advantage. Take up issues of your concern. Give it a serious feel. Cover stories on women who are not so privileged, whose voices are not heard of - one can really do that. But at the same time we have to accept the fact that the section needs to be commercialized a bit to get that kind of acceptance first. If you all of a sudden put these kind of issues in the newspaper nobody is going to buy it. And a little bit of calculation is definitely inevitable. The first concern anyway is to run the newspaper. Ideology does not make much sense if you don’t have that much of acknowledgment. And to survive and make your voice heard one has to be a bit tactful as well. I must say it is going to be a very very slow process. But it is possible to make the voice of women heard.” To quote Poorniama, “Women’s issue is not the beat I have ever covered because I am a woman. I probably have done a couple of article. But no such serious engagement to the issue. I understand women’s problem as a serious problem and that definitely disturbs
me. But I have not put a sincere effort to this issue specifically. However, women's issues or for that matter any issue can not be studied in isolation. While asked why the issue on the 'children being sold in Bolangir' covered by her as a follow up to the event did not get a gender perspective to it though the report said the girl was paid less than the boy, she defended by saying 'I don't think that needed to be highlighted because tribals in Orissa don't discriminate women on the basis of gender. Rather it is more prevalent in urban feudal kind of set up. And the girl child was not sold in less price because she was discriminated against but it was the understanding of the tribals of the urban mind set.' (the statement on the equal status of women in tribal area given by the journalist is her own personal perspective and is not based on any sociological approval). “However, women's issues definitely disturb me and some time I have done stories on it. Like for instance few days back there was a piece written by one of my fellow male colleague who is otherwise a feminist and reserves respect for women. And his intention was to attach some humour to the story that was perceived by me as a degrading note to women. Even I knew it was in good humour but I felt the message has not been properly conveyed and being in media we cannot afford to be that irresponsible. I wrote a piece as a reaction to his story just to show that the amount of violence words can create and I think in my own little ways being a woman, and being a woman journalist I tried to defend women's position. If I encounter with something that would disturb me, I definitely would respond to it as a woman journalist.” she goes on to add, “ while one talks of the coverage of women’s
issues, it is important to look at it how much space is given to soft issues. Due to the constraints from commercial point of view, very little space is given to human interest issues. If no sensational thing happen nobody would allow us to publish these stuff in the front page Grave problems like drinking water facilities, poor living standards of people in tribal area and unnecessary human life losses due to lack of medical care, lapses in PDS etc. goes unnoticed without any coverage because it does not cater to the demand of the market. And keeping these constrains in mind the expectation to give women’s issue a push is not as easy a job to pursue.”

At its surface level, most of the respondents fail to recognize there is any problem associated with being a woman in the profession. Being a woman reporter is in fact perceived by Sony as an advantage. She most of the time finds it easier to get access to people because she is a woman. Most of the time it so happens that people feel more comfortable talking to women and think that as women tend to be more sensitive they will be able to connect with their problem. And also the ‘lesser in frame’ non threatening appearance of women make the victims comfortable in front of women.” She realized it when she was covering health beat. But she does admit that there is certain disadvantage being a woman in the profession largely dominated by men. (Some) men tend to have this stereotypical image of working women that they would do anything to get information from them. One has to be very careful and maintain a business like, no nonsense attitude and pass the message across. She points out that she has never come across such situation as such but is aware of its
existence. As Reema points out while asked about her experiences while filing stories on rape and problems of sex workers and does her being a woman play any (adverse) role in working on the mission, she comes up saying that being a woman in fact has helped her giving it a more insightful perspective. Because she is a woman, it was easy on her part to access the sex worker and become friendly with them and find out exactly the kind of problems they encounter. In the company of a woman, they tend to invest a lot of faith which they would not do otherwise. And her story carried both the perspective giving a complete version of what happens with the sex workers in reality. Anita would add hesitantly, “well, the fact remains that we are women. And women are not easily accepted in certain areas. I remember one instance, once I had been to a remote place in Rajasthan to cover a story. And women of that village did not come out and spoke to me. The reaction was, what the hell am I doing here, a single women, not getting married and begetting sons, roaming around.”

though being a woman coming from a liberated family background and working in a more or less gender sensitive office set up, the women tend to transcend the gender disadvantage, the fact that the society is still a long way to go in accepting women’s liberation is well recognized by most of the respondents with their wide range of such encounters.

**Hard issues vs. Soft issues**

It must be pointed out that there is absolutely no reservation on deciding to allocate beats on the basis of gender. To quote Pankaj Bhora, 63 who heads the

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63 Pankaj Vorha is the Chief of Beauoro, HT, and was interviewed on 29th January, 2001 for insight.
local reporting team, "women are as competent as men are today. And they are well equipped as well. I have never encountered journalists lagging behind in covering a beat because they are women. Given an opportunity women would excel as much and I make it clear that there would not be any favour or discrimination in the assignment on the basis of gender." "Women journalists of the present generation are covering all kinds of beats ranging from politics, business, crime, to health, education, human rights" adds Usha Rai, a senior journalist. "Even sports is also handled by women these days which was kept exclusively for men. And with increasing infrastructural facilities provided by the organizations and media industries going more and more gender neutral, women are also allowed to cover war without hesitation. It works in favour of the women journalists. Women are given ample opportunity to prosper in the area of their choice without having to struggle much. It was not the case with our generation. Women would be delegated to cover only soft issues without given a choice and one remains there for the rest of her career because she belongs to the fair sex category." However, Mallika Chopra, a free lance journalist questions, "is it true they were not left with any choice or they preferred to remain there for they wanted to create a space for themselves there?" For, she felt, she has not experienced any kind of discrimination in covering issues because she is a woman. She points out that in a media set up women are given as much liberty and women generally choose to cover soft issues because there is a reluctance to cover issues more challenging. However, respondents are strictly divided on their choices and preferences to cover the  

64 Mallika Chopra is a free lance Journalist, and was interviewed in IWPP for insight.
range of beats assigned to them. Though some of them take a neutral stand by saying whatever beat is assigned is generally covered by them without much of involvement, and a part of the sample shows their preference to cover hard news because this is the only way they can sustain in the mainstream and prosper career wise, the large chunk voted for human interest issues though it might come in the way of their career prospects. It is also acknowledged that given their cultural conditioning and life experiences (which largely differs from that of men) women are better equipped to cover human interest issues where as men are good at business, politics, and other hard issues. Reema candidly admits, “I don’t think I can ever be able to handle stock market or related subjects but being a women am comfortable carrying issues that requires sensitivity and persuasion.” She has been covering issues related to juvenile justice and problems of sex workers and despite the danger of being repetitive, follows up all the issues that disturb her. The derogatory level of an activist journalist’ doesnot bother her commitment to the issues she prefer to cover. Poornaima Joshi, one of the prominent correspondents of HT and known for her candid and insightful coverage, prefers to covers human interest issues (against the ambitious trend of covering hard political stories to establish oneself career wise) such as education(her first priority), health, poverty etc. but would have strong reservation calling these issues as mere human interest or soft issues. As she puts it, “I look at the politics behind these issues. These are grave subjects which needs to be addressed. I would call it hard core journalism. When you want to reach at the core and try to find out the politics
behind it. What you call hard issue is power politik may be i.e. what is happening in the most happening of places- in the home department, in the IB or foreign affairs dept. or in the parliament or assemblies. These are the news that gets the largest coverage. But the journalists who cover these stories don’t have to do much to produce these stories. Depending on your contacts and networking with high places you can get informations even through telephone. And I would not call these stuff real politics. It is important to cover developmental issues in order to bring about change. But then it comes with understanding. And most of the journalists would not have that kind of an understanding I must admit. I would not like to do that kind of a job where one has so little scope to grow professionally and as a human being as well. Its not that I have not done that kind of stuff before but after years of my association with this profession I settle down to do the job that would satisfy me- and the stories I cover give me an immense sense of satisfaction. Any way, in recent years it has become fashionable to talk about development and people talk about it every where for the heck of it. But I sincerely think it needs a deeper understanding. And that comes when you are being able to connect with people at the ground level.” However, most of the journalists prefer not to take a radical stand against hard political issues though choose to settle down with ‘soft issues’ understanding quite well the significance of the later which often goes unnoticed by the media industry. Vijaya choose to take a proactive stand rather than being critical of the system, “. May be human interest issues don’t get as much importance as the hard issues get. But definitely they are finding
places and making their mark. It seems to be a very slow process. But I always consider human interest issues as important.... We have to accept the fact that political news will remain the life and blood of the newspaper. One certainly cannot change that. But one has to tactfully work within the framework. She goes on to add, "given a choice I would like to concentrate more on human interest stories. I have worked with issues like juvenile delinquencies, orphanage homes etc before and these are the kind of stories I would always like to do. Though these issues are leveled as soft issues and would stand in the way of your career prospects, I would settle down to do something that would give me satisfaction as a journalist. And it is not true that human-interest issues are sidelined all the time and are covered only as filler materials. I have done an entire series on old age home in HT and it is well received. And now you see, the case study of the two kids the journalist has bought from the remote village of Orissa is getting front-page coverage. And certainly it is for a cause that has been long ignored. Now people talk of these issues. It depends on the level of commitment of the journalists who cover these issues. Blaming it all on the management is not going to solve the problem." However, some of the respondents would admit their non-involvement with any particular issue. As Vibha would be candid enough to make it clear that she has no sincere commitment to any issue as such and clarify that being a journalist, "It is my job to project the story the way it happens, one should not get personally involved." She has a professional approach to the whole of it and points out that she joined journalism because she was fascinated the whole idea of "to be
the first person to know the events happening around’ and not because of some cause. This lack of involvement with any particular issues is witnessed among many journalists of the present era who shows a professional approach to the issues. Aruna would point out, "media doesnot play as significant a role as it is projected to be. A lot of issues are getting coverage everyday with every passing day like dowry, rape, crime etc. but has anything really changed? In fact we notice an increasing crime rate and the problems never get solved. Journalism is just like yet another profession and its high time we admit it. We all know the way the news items are manufactured and fabricated in order to suit the trend and we all are to be held responsible. The fact remains, there is absolutely no commitment for the issues we talk so frequently in the newspaper and thus, it loses its credibility."

The discussion quite vividly reflects the commitment and frustrations of the journalists while fighting for ‘space’ to give their concern its due status in the newspaper. The fact that media industry is going increasingly commercialized and in order to survive in the market it mostly concentrate on deciding its priority on ‘what sells’ the journalists seem to be crushed between the reality and their individual preferences. Though for some of them it is impossible to swim against the tide, some do pursue their interest despite the pressure, sometime tactfully and sometime in an aggressive manner. Pointing out at the most realistic approach in a media situation, Sony goes on to point out, " in a newspaper these days everybody is fighting for space. And the newspaper gives preference to the stories that sells in the market. So getting fixated in a
particular issue and going on and on with it would not be possible because the management itself will not allow.” But she is quite certain if the news item has strength, it definitely gets a space in the newspaper. But the fact that one has to keep the management in good humour in order to survive in the field is reflected in many of the statements provided by the respondents. However, not all would give in “I intend to give coverage to the issues of my interest as much possible and I am working hard on it. There is a tendency in the newspaper industries to sideline these issues because of the belief that ‘it won’t sell’. I would blame it on the system where journalists have such limited scope. These industries are mostly run by top shot industrialists who have so little (if at all) understanding of the ground reality. They don’t understand the importance of covering human interest issues. They would only insist on news items that would sell. The items that are fashionable, whatever is ‘in’? And the issues of core importance don’t get the deserved coverage. It is not considered how mush effort have been put to produce a story. It is the barraging power of the story that matters. Its frustrating at times. I remember one incident that was really frustrating in my case. I spent months together in Bolangir in hot summer, baked in the sun, staying in villages and talking to people of the villages to understand the problems that should be of grave concern. I filed three different stories of entirely different context which would be considered rich pieces from a pure journalistic point of view. So immense was the urge to give these findings a coverage, I rushed to the district HQ to fax the stories to the head office.and days after I came back to Delhi I found those stories
published in the newspaper in some inner page, merged into one story of five hundred words which absolutely would lose its meaning and dimension. To be specific, the item did not make any sense. You tend to get desensitized if encountered with such cold blooded treatment to your level of concern. I have traveled widely all over India to understand the root cause of poverty, starvation, illiteracy. Each time you are in the field, you encounter with some new insight to the whole issue. And it is bad that as journalists we are not being able to convey the message across because of the limitations we have in this profession. But I would emphasize, if one is diplomatic and tactful enough and have deep understanding of it, it is possible to push through the issue to some extent.” Pointing out at the practical situation of the media industry one is constantly encountered with, Poornima would add indignantly. Anita Saluja acknowledges the importance of human interest issues getting priority in newspapers and claims that given a choice she would rather prefer to write on these issues, stories that are more creative. The kind of stories that would change people’s perspective. But she settles down to cover politics. To quote her, “well, nothing prevents me from doing the stories of my choice, not at least at this stage of my career. And all said and done, we are our own masters. But the problem is that these kind of stories will not be recognized much in the newspapers and will find a place in some corner.” And she definitely does not want her stories to be sidelined. “Yes, a little bit of self interest comes in between and it takes away the better of us. You see, you write a story putting all your efforts of the day, run around and collect the data, feed it in the
computer and send it and what they would do is throw it in the dust bin at its worst or if at all it get published, it will be in the inner page somewhere down the corner. And I don’t want that. As a journalist we all want recognition. And that’s the fact.”

Political Sensitivity

Market and Media: The news items covered by the media industry is largely determined by the economic interest of the newspaper which in a way restricts the independence of the journalists in focussing on issues that is considered to be significant. The recent trend of the newspaper industry is to focus more on the marketability of the product. Succumbing to the pressure of ‘what sells’ syndrome some of the journalists choose to stick to the managerial decision where as very few may overtly or covertly revolt. “Since last two/three years management has taken the decision not to give women’s issues a coverage in the Magazine section because it feels readers are simply no more interested to read these stuff any more. Catering to the taste of the readers Magazine should concentrate only on light and glamourous stuff. The trend is changing and thus, we have stopped giving human interest issues a coverage in the Magazine. It is more for a light reading” points out Seema Kumar, the assistant Editor, Magazine matter of factly who has been working for this section since last four odd years. Arti, who has completed two decades in the local reporting team of HT shows her serious concern for the declining value of the media. She finds the new trend in the industry is adversely affecting the

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65 Arti is a Senior Reporter with HT, and was interviewed on 5th January, 2002.
credibility of a newspaper. To quote her, “when I joined the industry the paper was more concerned about the quality of the coverage to issues in local reporting. The new comers would cover crime in their initial stage- that would give them an understanding of the city as a whole, then they would be given the beats on health or education, then court, and finally government. That way, a journalist gets a full scope to grow professionally, strengthening his/her grounding first and then moving on. The stories covered by them would be insightful and clear. But now a days the management is no more serious about the quality of the story. Journalists in this section are given beats on the basis of their contacts and networking. Thus, one finds the coverage on the city reporting very frivolous and what you call, sensational. I think the newspaper should concentrate more on the quality of the product rather that the marketing aspect of it.” Poornima Joshi points out the tactics and diplomatic manner in which one has to go through to give coverage to an issue that needs recognition. The fact that they had to buy two children in Orissa to get the starvation issue a front page coverage still pinches but ‘one has to make a cold blooded choice’, she shies. “It has become fashionable to talk of developmental issues in newspaper industry these days, but if it is not sensational, nobody would buy it.” She goes on to add. However, some of them attempt to work within the system in a proactive manner not looking down upon the changing trend. As Vijaya would try to pacify, “being journalists we have to keep in mind that the industry is run by the industrialists whose sole motive is to make profit. And they would let you produce only what sells in the market. And all
said and done what sales in the market is politics and sensational news. Politics is the life and blood of a newspaper. There is no escaping out of it. But that does not mean we succumb to the pressure and act as per the trend. There is always a scope to produce the news items of your taste and give it a coverage. But all one has to do is to give it a different angle that would suit the commercial purpose as well.” As Reema Natrajan, a senior correspondent in the local reporting team puts it, “though women’s issue gets a coverage in the city page, it is not free from politics.” She has been covering issues on rape and dowry for quite sometime and portraying the manipulating stand media takes in giving the news a space, she points out, “if a rape incident in slum area is covered the newspaper won’t give it a priority. Because these are very common and who reads their stmes anyway. But if it is a rape case in Greater Kailash or Vasant Vihar the news will get a wide coverage because it satisfies the norm of something uncommon and sensational.”

**Women, Patriarchy and Culture:** Women journalists are uncomfortable recognizing any presence of discrimination being women in the profession. But segregation of men women is acknowledged. Though women journalists in the set up share a very informal and healthy relationship in the organization there is a subtle way of treating women differently(by the management) because they are women would crop up sporadically in the course of discussion. As Reema puts it matter of factly, “if one goes at the night or the case is slightly dangerous the editor himself would recommend to take the photographer along with and we being women take these kind of precautions which men would not
need.” To quote Tulika, “discrimination or rather segregation of women and men exists everywhere even in the most liberal looking set up. Setting an example of HT, which organizes parties and get togethers almost every other day she points out that mostly women are not invited there because these are late night parties and booze parties and women are expected to go back home after work because they have household responsibilities. It is true that most of the women don’t opt to go there and you would be looked down upon if you frequent these places quite often. But I don’t see any harm in going to these parties. These are happening places as well and we get to know more people and build contact. We also want some refreshment. But it is not a well digested fact in our kind of society.” Discrimination in its subtle forms becomes manifested when it comes to promotion of women. Though the entry of women professionals to the organization is increasing with the changing trend generally there is resistance from the management when it comes to giving women a responsible administrative posts with a underlying explanation that women won’t be able handle authoritative jobs as effectively. It may be noted that all the editors in HT are men. “There is this systematic effort to look down upon women no matter how hard one tries to prove herself.” Seema Kumar, She calls herself privileged because she has never faced any problem on account of being a woman. She has always worked in a very supportive atmosphere where her bosses have been cooperative. And she feels protected working with them. But she is very much aware of the kind of harassment women go through because they are women. She even knows instances where
women leave the job as they can’t cope up with the kind of demands made on them from the authority because they are women. However, she was quick to point out, mostly it is women who are responsible for such kind of situation. It lots depend on the way one conducts one self that makes a lot of difference. And these days women in this field have become so ambitious that they would do anything to reach the top. “If you let loose yourself then the impact is on large scale on the society. Somewhere the morale is lacking and some of the women as well are responsible, it is not only men who are involved in this whole process.” She shows strong reservations on the kind of clothes women these days wear to the office or field and how it provokes further degradation.

However, though working in the office is not considered as hazardous by the respondents, women reporters do hesitantly admit that working in the field is (not) as easy. Journalism is definitely considered a demanding as well as a challenging profession especially for women owing to its erratic hours (some would prefer to call it elastic hours) and shift arrangements alongwith a lot of traveling involved. With this preconception in mind I was quite certain in getting responses with elaborate details of the problems encountered by the women professionals. But contrary to my hypothesis women working as reporter would not consider the job assigned to them as challenging as it has been portrayed to be. Not at least at its surface level. In an increasingly competitive scenario, where women are in constant attempt to be in the rat race, nobody seems to be willing to talk about the limitations. Arti who has spent two decades of her career in journalism claims that she has never found
the job hours as erratic but elastic. The nature of the job is such that one cannot stick to the timings. But then 'we joined the profession knowing fully well the work schedule and it sounds ridiculous if we complain of this now. All of us (should) have made some alternative arrangement back home if we intend to stick to this profession.' Sony points out, "Being a woman reporter is in fact perceived by her as an advantage. She most of the time finds it easier to get access to people because she is a woman. Most of the time it so happens that people feel more comfortable talking to women and think that as women tend to be more sensitive they will be able to connect to their problem." Manisha adds, "It is generally easier for women to access the sources than that of men, because the set up is such that people generally are polite to women." Reema figures the advantage of being a woman reporter by saying that being a women we generally can access to the women folk as well and are able to give the perspective of the other side as well which otherwise goes on heard of. In fact it was difficult to make the respondents recall any incidents they would have ever encountered which would give them a feeling of being underestimated because they are women. Anita, principal correspondent, would attempt hard to recall an incident where she had experienced some kind of concern which was rather gender sensitive, to quote her, "I remember once I was returning after visiting the Arul Drass murder in a remote area of Orissa late in the night. And the police officers on duty stopped my car and were literally flabbergasted. What is a woman alone doing in such a tense area late in the night? And they advised me to be careful on the way and asked one of the policemen to escort me till
the town nearby. You encounter such incidents in small places and remote states generally. But I would not react to it saying why should one treat me like a woman. These are generally for security reasons and we definitely understand the way society functions. It should actually be seen as a security issue.”

Reema would quick to respond, “The hurdles in this profession is not as acute as it is portrayed by the society actually. Like for instance, covering crime is considered to be one of the dangerous beats. But I have been covering it for years together and find the crime spots to be the safest. When you come to know about the crime and reach the spot, the police is already there, the whole neighborhood is there and of course the rest of our tribes from other papers. Where is the insecurity? We don’t do those chasing after the thief kind of stuff as projected in the films.” She maintains her light spirit. But on second thought, she would add, “of course sometimes where the case is slightly dangerous or its late in the night, our shift head would ask we women to take the photographer along with as an escort and we do take these precautions. That way the management is quite gender sensitive. may be we fail to understand the problem because of the logistic support(in terms of male escort or conveyance) provided by the organizations.” Sweta would add, “Like for instance HT had sent two women to Kargil to cover war. But before that a team was sent to find out whether it is safe to send women there and only after getting the green signal could they go. The management is no more against women folks covering issues but rather is getting gender sensitive keeping in mind the increasing entry of women in the profession which works in our favour”.

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Poornima would rebel, "it is no point cribbing all the time of our limitations because we are women. We are already the privileged lot for the very fact that we could make it to this place. Now when we are given an opportunity to do something, we must overlook the disadvantages and work as equals. One thing is for sure, un till and unless we give them a chance nobody can even do the slightest harm to us." To get a perspective of what the elder generation of journalists has to say about their experiences in the field, Anita Saluja, Chief of Bureau, Indian Express adds, "I must admit its difficult for 'ladies' to work in the field, at least to an extent. Our world with which we deal is not all that good. And people try to take all kind of advantage with you. You have to be really firm and should not give in." however, she is confident that women are well equipped to handle it. "Of course, you have to be really firm and not let anybody take liberty with you. Don’t let them make any pass on you. And I think all of us have this instinct to sense whether a person is good or bad and you have to act accordingly. For a woman it is really important to maintain that kind of a firm image. And it is also true that there is an inherent fear in people about the power of a journalist. It may be misconceived, but that helps a woman journalist to an extent as well which should not be overlooked. And it is also a fact that there are some you just have to avoid. There is no other way out." But not all of the respondents would afford to overlook the problems encountered by them at some point of time or the other which relates to the nature of their job. As Rosy would recall, "It has never been easy staying alone or with a group of girls in a rented apartment in a metro with the appendage of
the nature of job we are in. I remember when I moved into this city. Finding a house was real difficult. Nobody would come forward to give you a house because you are a girl. And every thing is wrong with you. You are single, you are working and your working hours are erratic. They are generally suspicious of the exact nature of your job. In fact we were a group of us looking for an apartment. And they were (mis)interpreting our erratic working hours as if we are a racket of girls involved in some ‘ulta sidha’ thing and would not give us an accommodation. Lots of people did not give us a house because of that only. And finally when we managed to get a house in Mayur Bihar, we had our night shifts as usual. And the land lady will come every other day and tell us “Aap lok der der tak ghar nehin atee, hen. Log tarah tarah ki baat karte hen. Tumareh parents keise akele chhod dien hain.......” the bottom line is this is not something socially acceptable. And we had to explain to her on an weekly basis, look, we all are educated and comes from well to do families. This is the nature of our job. Our parents have left us here because they have that much of confidence on us. So try and convince your neighbours this is the kind of job we are in, and this is the work schedule. It would not convince her any way.”

Vijaya would add categorically that though her family has been liberated enough in giving her the freedom to pursue the career of her choice, it is not easy convincing the people around. “See, it is actually a lot of ignorance one has to deal with. And my parents face much more of it than I do. They have been really patient in this matter. They would rather go on explaining exactly what the nature of my job to the friends is and relatives all around where as I
myself give up sometime. It is still an unacceptable situation for people to accept women working till late in the night where as there are other options(with nine to five fixed hour timing) left.” However, being in the field, which is largely dominated by men, is something that sometime work in favour of women. As to quote Minakshi66, “if you are a woman in the midst of a large group of men, you are noticed easily and your voice is distinct.” Anita adds, “well, I have never faced such kind of a problem. It depends how you conduct yourself with the people around that determine your status in the work place.” (the fact that one needs to create a veneer around her to protect her femininity reflects in her statements though she does not acknowledge the fact).

‘We’ and ‘They’

There is strong reservation among most of the respondents while confronted with a direct question ‘being women, do they consider themselves as a category.’ They would rather prefer to maintain a ‘unisex’ image in their professional front than categorize themselves in any form. To quote Anita, Principal Correspondent, “I am a journalist and I would not level myself as a woman journalist. I see myself basically as a reporter, doing my job, and doing it to the best of my ability. At least I don’t see those kind of distinctions.” But she goes on to add, “There is a category called women journalists, yes, those who cover women’s issues particularly.” Sony would not like to categorize herself or limit herself to any particular cause. She takes journalism as a profession and her involvement with any human interest issue would not cross

66 Minakhsi Kumar is a senior reporter with HT City, and was interviewed on 7th January, 2002.
beyond her humanitarian concern. She would not allow these kind of inhibition affect her career in any way and would rather categorize herself as an ambitious journalist whose sole concern is to reach at the top and she sees no wrong in it. She points out that the danger of being fixated with a particular issue or cause is that the bias as a writer comes in which is not done in journalism. “As a journalist our job is to convey the message. And it should not be biased or value loaded. However, one finds these kinds of ‘activist journalists’ in all papers but then, you have to sacrifice your ambition if you really wish to fight. And I choose to belong to the former category. However, the edit page is there to talk about these stuff but I would like to concentrate in hard news, the kind I have been doing.” But she wants to stay as a reporter all through her life. She finds her job very exciting- one gets scope to meet people from every walk of life, you get the deserved recognition. Tulika, who works for the HT on line, does not connect herself much to the idea of categorizing herself because she is a woman but definitely identify with the problems women generally face. Being a woman would make one more sensitive to women’s issues than that of men. However, she has never done anything in a collective manner for women and would not call herself a woman activist. But she recalls taking up women’s issues and putting some effort to solve it because she is in a more privileged position. She recalls one incident where her maid servant was beaten up by her husband every other day and was wanting to get rid of it but did not know how to go about it. She helped her getting a divorce and also helped her finding a secured job to sustain herself economically. She also points out that she
sponsors a girl child’s education through an organization which gives her some satisfaction. She adds that most of the educated liberated women practice feminism in some form or the other and figures out that even if she stays in a joint family with her in laws around she would make it a point not cook after coming back late from the office and stresses on equal division of labour with her husband in all household work. It is important to clarify from the very beginning that since both of us contribute to the family income, it is essential that both of us contribute to the house hold chores.” Some of the respondents strongly disagree with this simplification and would point out that it is not possible to identify with women’s problem only because we are women. Women are again divided and sub divided into different strata on the basis of class, life experiences and caste. Being a woman would not qualify one to connect to the women lot, it is the sensitivity and the commitment to the women’s cause that makes a difference.

Lack of networking among women journalists within the set up and beyond is pointed out to be the cause why women journalists don’t come out unitedly for women’s cause refusing themselves a particular category by some of the respondents. One of the major recent changes in the media industry is definitely increasing number of entry of women in this profession. But however, this increasing presence has affected the networking among women journalists adversely. Women don’t seem to connect to each other any more only because they are women. To quote Sony Sangwan, “There is no bond between women in the profession. And women never come united for a women
cause.” Remembering one incident of sexual harassment case where a woman reporter complained of an editor she points out, “few of us raised the issue in the union meeting, most of them kept quite and finally the journalist joined another paper and the matter ended there. These kinds of expectations in our profession does not get fulfilled. Its all talk. At their individual level, everybody is concerned about their career. Reema would add, “an organized women forum is a rare phenomena. Being women we definitely relate more to women. After all we are women, may be in somewhat a privileged position, but we definitely are able to connect to women’s issues. It is a different matter if somebody wishes to overlook. But unfortunately women don’t work collectively in most of the cases. Very rarely have I seen women coming together to push through an issue.” She would add in a lighthearted spirit, “the last time I remember we came together was to provide the women professionals’ cleaner toilets and the pressure on management was so immense that the problem got solved within no time.” However, she would sum up with a more serious tone, “I must insist there is greater strength in coming together but it does not happen for some reason or the other. And may be we don’t attach much importance to it.” However, a request before the management to provide a day care unit within the office set up needs to be made collectively, adds Aruna, but nobody takes the issue seriously. However, Seema fully acknowledging the importance of networking amongst women would go on to justify the limitations insisting on the time factor. “Where is the time?” she would argue. “After work all women with family would like to go back home
and take care of the household work. Women professionals are generally more concentrated within their work and family. There is absolutely no place to linger on after work in a Press Club or go for a get together to even relax, leave aside the involvement with larger cause in a collective manner. Even within the office set up, there is no such belongingness because we are women. At least there has never any conscious effort in this direction.” She winds up. Though there is a club exclusively for women journalists, journalists hardly frequent the place. To quote Usha Rai, one of the founding members of Indian Women’s Press Corp, “it is no more easy to maintain a networking among the women journalists, partly because the number of women in the field of journalism has gone manifold and partly because the approach to the profession is changing drastically.” Nobody is interested any more to take up women’s issues and things have changed over the years.” Points out Mallika Chopra, the networking (or lack of it) among the women journalists in the present context has a lot to do with the changing method of assignment. Jobs are assigned on a contractual basis these days making everybody insecure about their job. Any kind of revolt against the management and there are chances you lose the job. And professionals choose to safeguard their job rather than fighting for a cause.”

The question that has been raised in this section is the impact of women as insiders in the culture of print media. The elaborated field reports and insights provides the evident emergence of a changing culture. However, it must be clarified that Hindusthan Times as a leading English national daily acquire a
special meaning. First, English as a language has been accepted as the cultural capital in India. It has not yet become the language of the ordinary Indians speaking the regional languages like Tamil, Oriya, Kannada, Bengali or Hindi. There is indeed an element of eliticism and cultural exclusion surrounding the politics of English as a language of communication. And the observations show that the professionals working in English newspapers tend to emerge from the privileged sections of Indian society. They are broadly metropolitan, upper class with exclusivist form of schooling and university education. Possibly the cultural specificity of an English newspaper is reflected in the findings. Women professionals in this field are seen having a reasonable degree of self assurance and confidence, who do not necessarily complain of having a discriminated/stigmatized identity. They on the other hand choose to see themselves professionals like other male counterparts. In other words, it is not the story of a very explicit and feasible exclusion of women. We also see some kind of a critical consciousness and sensitivity emanating from them. They see the ideology behind the categorization, prioritization and classification of news. They also experience the agony of other women who are suffering and realize the limits to the sites of work in which they are engaged. In other words the entire narrative that we got from HT is a complex one and full of diverse possibilities. On the one hand, it speaks of the dynamics of class and gender. It shows that the identity of women cannot altogether be isolated from her class identity. Hence women professionals in a metropolitan English newspaper who come from a privileged class cannot necessarily be categorized as
discriminated. That is why in the HT, among these professionals a positive story of criticality and sensitivity is noticed. There is also an awareness of the politico-economic constraints and simultaneously some kind of restlessness for striving for a more egalitarian and gender sensitive media culture. What does happen if the focus is shifted from an English daily to a more down to earth Hindi Daily? Is it a different story? Or, is there continuity?

IV

Navbharat Times: Yet, Another Narrative

In order to draw a comparative perspective, Navbharat Times was taken as a sample representative from the vernacular press. The journalists of the press were interviewed to get an insiders’ perspective.

Navbharat Times is rated as the largest circulated Hindi daily in India with a team of 62 journalists working for the production of news items. What is reveling and in contrast to the English daily Hindustan Times (that I have covered) is the strikingly less representation of women journalists in the Press. 4 out of 62 journalists are women and none in the decision making position. Besides interviewing the women journalists, the editor, news editor, an assistant editor and few other male correspondents were also interviewed to get an insiders’ perspective. During my brief period of participant observation of 15 days in the news room and interaction with the journalists, I got an entirely different picture of the functioning of media industry where male female segregation is concerned. Though time is changing in favour of women
journalists, for the Hindi Press the process is a far too slow in comparison to the English Press - I settle down to conclude.

**Social Composition**

All the women journalists were covered during the course of field work. Four of them interviewed are young and aspiring individuals with a sincere involvement with the jobs they are assigned with. Three out of four are married and one of them with a kid. Two of the respondents are second generation journalists who give full credit to their family background for carefully nurturing their ambition with adequate support structure. To quote Namita Joshi, a young journalist who has joined the NT last year, "I have been freelancing since my college days which has proved to be of advantage in pursuing in this line. My father is in this profession and he has been my ideal since childhood. He in fact has encouraged me a lot in this line and his being in this profession helps me getting access to many journalists on personal level. This family backing has helped Bhasa in yet another way. Her father has been a journalist back home in Lucknow and she has been brought up in a journalist background. She claims that she already was fully aware of the dynamics of this profession before joining the career formally because of her exposure to the media world through her father. The rest two comes from educated middle class background (in both the cases fathers government servant and mothers house wives) that have not faced any resistance in terms of their career choices.

67 Namita Joshi is the Copy Editor (Features) cum Reporter with NT, and was interviewed on 11th March, 2002.
68 Bhasa Singh is the Copy Editor (Features) cum Reporter with NT and was interviewed on 15th March, 2002.
Two of the respondents are born and brought up in Delhi. One is from Bihar and the fourth one from Uttar Pradesh (Lucknow). All of them have done their schooling in Hindi medium and acknowledge that they had a flair for Hindi language from the very beginning, which has helped them tremendously in this profession. Respondents who are married acknowledge that their husbands have been very supportive which has worked as a boon. Anu Jain who has been working as a reporter (the only woman reporter in the city desk) admits that she was very calculative while choosing a life partner for herself because she knew from the very beginning that her job is her first priority and she would not leave the job for the sake of her family. Her husband is an engineer and perfectly understands the dynamics of a working wife. There is no raise of eye brows or combative atmosphere back home because of her erratic hours of job schedule or demanding job responsibilities. Bhasa is married to a fellow journalist which makes it even easier to have perfect understanding. Manjula has a supportive family as well. She stays in a joint family and her mother in law takes care of her two years kid while she is out in the office. Namita is the only one unmarried and is quite apprehensive of the fact that after marriage things might not remain the same. However, she is quite certain of pursuing with the career against all odd. In fact she revels that her colleagues’ married status have is working as a limitation in prospering in the field as they have to combine their family responsibility with their career (a fact not acknowledged, and accepted as a part of life by the respondents she refers to). ‘And also

69 Anu Jain is the Reporter with NT and was interviewed on 15th March, 2002
70 Manjula Singh was the Copy Editor with NT, and was interviewed on 21st March, 2002
married women are not taken seriously in this office’, she confides. However, she points out that she will not think of marriage for next two three years and will concentrate fully on her career and establish herself in the field.

**Self Reflexibility**

Women journalists interviewed in NT definitely perceive journalism more than a profession. It is a recognized fact that Hindi journalism is not as lucrative, money or otherwise to pursue it as a career, and unlike English Press there is absolutely no encouragement to women professionals to prosper career wise. Given all these constraints coming one’s way, those who have made it to the positions they are today are quite articulate in their own way about what is (perceived as) their role in the set up not denying the limited scope they have within the present scenario. It must be highlighted that there is a sense of involvement with the assignment they are given and a sincere attempt to prove themselves in every possible way in order to change the traditional mindset of the set up, “women are less capable than that of men”. Swimming against the tide clearly is proving to be difficult yet challenging for these journalists. As Bhasa would point out, “I came to the profession with a mission. To do something for the cause I am fighting for. But I am totally crippled in the given set up.” It must be pointed out that she is also associated with a ‘Progressive Women’s Forum’ along with this profession. “I have always wanted to write on women’s issues and used to write on issues concerning women’s problems when I was freelancing. But here in this profession there is absolutely no platform to nurture my interest. And ofcourse I am fresh and at the receiving
end, thus, don’t have a voice. But when I am in a responsible position, I will do something constructive as a conveyer of the exact scenario of women in our society.” Manjula is sincere with her assignments and strongly feels that Hindi Press should overcome the syndrome of imitating the English Press. Very little scope is assigned to the journalists working here and she disapprovingly adds, “my job has been reduced to a mere translator from English to Hindi.” Anu wants to use her creativity and sensitivity, which is quite different from her male colleagues, in more defined ways and give all the issues a sensitive angle. She would point out that the issues she covers generally are more sensitive and it has a lot to do with her being a woman. “Women are generally more sensitive and more creative than that of men.” she points out assertively. However, she also admits that being a woman curtail her possibility of rising the promotional ladder. Hindi Press as such is suffering from stagnation, echo all the journalists, as far as promotions are concerned and being a woman is definitely an appendage. Anu has been in this profession for last nine years with the same newspaper but is still assigned to cover soft issues like health, education and some times crime. She however enjoys her work and does her assignments without complaining. “That is the most important virtue a women journalist has to have in order to sustain in this profession”, she confides. When asked whether she ever wishes to cover politics in order to find herself in mainstream journalism, she quickly responds, “I am too practical to dream such things. Women are never given these beats, which are considered important for the newspaper no matter how hard one tries. However, the trend has started in the
English newspaper and we can hope for a better future.” She also goes on to add that there is no point cribbing over limitations. Instead she is more constructive in realizing her strength and believes in using her sensitivity and creativity to its utmost while reporting. She refutes the concept of objective reporting as a myth and clarifies that it is not possible to be neutral when you are dealing with issues that affects you directly. However, she admits that being a woman she has sometimes failed to do certain assignments and wished ‘she were a boy.’ Recalling an incident when she was asked to cover a crime in East Delhi few years back, she hesitantly admits that she went to the spot with a male colleague from TOI in the office conveyance and it was late in the night. The spot was a bit too chaotic and the tension was at its high. She felt insecure and asked her colleague to go ahead and update her about the situation and waited instead in the office car. She acknowledges that it is all because I am a woman and I understand the kind of problems women face in such situations I withdrew. And these self imposed restrictions work against their career prospects. The management did understand her problem when she explained the whole situation and she has never been assigned to cover such stories after that. These incidents get generalized and to quote Naresh Aggarwal\textsuperscript{71}, the news editor, “you won’t find women journalists as adventurous as in the case in English media like Barkha Datt hailing from Kargil. It is mostly because the kind of background they come from. Girls working with Hindi press come from relatively conservative background.” However, Bal Mukund Sinha\textsuperscript{72}, the

\textsuperscript{71} Naresh Aggarwal is the News Editor with NT, and was interviewed on 18\textsuperscript{th} March, 2002.
\textsuperscript{72} Bal Mukund Sinha is the Assistant Editor with NT, and was interviewed on 15\textsuperscript{th} March, 2002
assistant Editor points out that things are changing in favour of women and women should avail the opportunities given to them in more constructive ways instead of comparing them with that of men.” Recalling his experience with Hindi journalism for last two decades he opines, “In the initial stage of my career there were no women in the press. Gradually women started making an entry which caused initial hiccups. But now women journalists are easily accepted. In fact we are more open with them in discussing any kind of issues that we could not have thought of a decade ago. Women liberation is inevitable as long as it is not blown out of proportion. And one needs to have patience and persuasion to realize that” And a male chauvinist attitude combined with moral policing in its subtle (and some time not so subtle) form would crop up in the course of my discussion with him very now and then in forms of his constant comments on women’s sense of dressing, the way they behave and his strong reservation against the beauty contests and women’s movements etc. However, Ram Kripal Singh 73, the Chief Editor gropes and points out, “remarkable invisibility of women journalists in the Hindi Press is definitely requiring a self search. But it is not as simple. In a society with such a complicated structure, it is not possible to give an answer in black and white. There are many shades of gray in it, which needs to be looked into. Journalism as a profession has not opened up as much to provide everybody a scope. In order to establish oneself in this profession needed a lot of struggle to which most of them succumb to.” Contesting my view on journalism now has ample of opportunities; he went on to correct me, “taking a sample of the leading dailies of the country would

73 Ram Kripal Singh is the Chief Editor, NT, and was interviewed on 25th March, 2002.
certainly not give a clear picture of the exact scenario of the media industry. In a country where lakhs of newspapers are published daily, Times of Indias and Hindusthan Times are the exceptions not the rule. Very few industries are surviving in the market where as many faces enormous set backs on the way. The journalists don’t get a pay scale that would let them lead a comfortable life style. Job security is not there and in such a frustrating scene it is not responsible to expect a lot from the profession. Even in Navbharat Times the journalists are not paid as handsomely as their English counterparts. Thus, there is a distinct difference between Hindi (and any other vernacular) and English newspapers.”

Prioritization of News

The hierarchy of news items is quite well accepted among the journalists who understand the preference of hard issues over soft issues. To quote Bhasa, who attempts to introduce me to the loopholes of the Hindi Press, “human interest issues find very little place in a Hindi newspaper. Politics and sensational news are given the first priority. At least in English newspapers developmental issues are discussed as a fashionable subject. But Hindi Press doesnot even do that. We have absolutely no platform to fight for.” And Ram Kripal Singh, the Chief Editor nods, “politics is the major theme in any newspaper today. In fact the media industries are highly influenced by the political parties and many newspapers have reduced themselves to a mouthpiece of some political parties or the other. Depoliticization of Press is the first step which needs to be taken in order to save the media industry from the incredibility it is suffering from.”
And a newspaper predominated by hard news, soft issues or human interest issues are given very little coverage. And within soft issues women’s issues are given trivial (if at all) priority. It has been clearly pointed out by the women journalists that the newspaper has absolutely no space for women’s issues. It is agreed that institutional norms and values that guide the production of media does not value gender sensitivity. Articulating fully well the importance of women’s issues being highlighted, Manjula points out, “women’s issues get coverage sporadically on an International Women’s Day or if a women reservation Bill is to be passed on in the Parliament. There is a lack of involvement for women’s cause from the management side mostly because these news items donot sell. Nobody is concerned about the discrimination of women lot in particular and newspaper as such does not acknowledge its responsibility to carry forward this particular cause.” “And women’s issues do get coverage. “One of the male correspondents from the city reporting retaliates, “But it is given coverage when it is topical. All the dowry death or rape cases are reported in the newspaper which was not the case two decades ago.” And Manjula remarks, “These issues get coverage because these conforms to the norm of being sensational and therefore would sell.”

Namita who works with the features desk points out that in “Hello Delhi” women personalities do get coverage but newspaper is not quite serious on covering issues that would help highlight women’s problems. She however wishes to find a place in mainstream journalism by covering hard issues. Though the trend in the Hindi Press is not in favour of women as yet, she is
quite hopeful of a changing trend in near future in favour of women journalists. “It ultimately one’s competence and potentialities is what matters.” She asserts against all odd. But Bhasa is quite pessimistic about this struggle. Though she perceives more women in decision making position in Hindi Press will help change the recent trend in favour of women’s issues, she finds the road quite uphill.

Political Sensitivity

Market and media: it is a well acknowledged fact that commercialization of media in recent years is playing a pivotal role in changing the whole dynamics of value based journalism, agree all the journalists interviewed. The media industries are run by corporate sectors whose main aim is to make profit. And in order to sell the newspapers the news items are manipulated to suit the taste of the readers. This factory like production of news items concentrates more on its marketability rather than the quality of the items. “Being the editor does not give one all the authority to choose all that one wants to do with the newspaper. Rather the constraints are overpowering.” Using the metaphor of a ‘Diabetic Halwai’ who sells something which he himself is prescribed not to consume, the chief editor sulkingly remarked that the media industry does not function catering to the mission of some well intentioned journalists but is ruled by the market driven forces. Manjula points out that those in decision making position insist on writing stuff that would be light and sensational. Both Bhasa and Namita working for ‘Hello Delhi’ point out that this supplement is only published imitating its English counter parts in order to make it a popular
reading. These supplements are free of substance and carry frivolous materials which make light reading. "After the kind of education we have got and the values we have inherited I find it extremely hard to cope up with the present kind of assignment I am given," Bhasha remarks. But Namita would not give up. "It is the right place from where one can take off if one chooses to look at it that way. On the course of writing stories for this page one is being able to build up networking which would help one in the later stage of one's career. And we get a lot of exposure to the high society as well." She in fact takes a proactive stand and believes in working within the establishment rather than being critical about it. "What is the point being critical about things one has no control over". She speaks up.

Women, patriarchy and culture: The universal contention that women all over are the discriminated lot in every sphere is clearly supported by the women journalists working with the organization. The patriarchal ideology is quite well reflected in every sphere of the society whether in the family, office set up or society at large. Women journalists working in the set up points out that it is only because they have liberal family backgrounds who understand the importance of women's economic independence they are being able to make it to this position. But they do agree if situation demands women are the first ones to sacrifice their career for the sake of family responsibility. Manjula points out that it is only because her mother in law is staying with her and taking care of the kid she is managing the career as well. And she is managing it because she has fixed hours of working schedule, thanks to the management,
which takes care of women's needs back home. And she does agree she does most of the household chores along with the job which is generally not expected from her husband. The society treats women and men differently and it has to be acknowledged. She adds without complaining. Namita is quite apprehensive marriage might change all the equation of her career prospects. She criticizes the whole dynamics of the institution of marriage that makes women always the insecure lot. "I cannot expect the same kind of freedom that I am availing now once I am married." She adds. Anu however points out that it is the women who always succumb to the pressure. "It is high time we break these inhibition and wake up." Office set up has been equally patriarchal. Women are treated as the less capable lot and are sympathized for little reasons. They are assigned works which are considered not so important and not treated at par with men. and the society has never been kind to women. Bhasa points out, "I don't remember a single woman I have come across who can vouch she has not gone through some kind of harassment or the other being a woman." "But the problem with women in particular and society in general is that we donot acknowledge it as a issue." Adds Anu. Manjula goes on to figure out that this is exclusively a women's problem and women should fight for themselves. And fighting against the patriarchal trend is not as easy. Anu points out that even trivial matters like wearing something unconventional (other than salwarkurta i.e.) would cause raise of eyebrows in our kind of society. And there is always a strict guideline as to what one woman 'should' or 'should not' do. 'Deviate slightly from these and you will face the music.'
She sincerely wishes for a strong networking amongst women to change this age old practice of patriarchal culture. There are a lot of movements going on but women still have a long way to go, all of them would agree.

**Relatedness to suffering women:** all the respondents interviewed have a clear understanding of women’s problems and emphasize on the importance of highlighting the sufferings of women lot in order to generate awareness. Being a woman definitely help women journalists relate more to women’s issues given the kind of cultural conditioning and life experiences women universally encounter. Bhasa has worked a lot for women’s cause as a social activist and shows her discomfort, as the newspaper provides no space to cover women’s issues. It must be pointed out that the editors also agree on the point that women’s issues is no where in the priority list as these news are not preferred by the readers. However Manjula does point out there is no ‘the’ women’s problem or being a woman is not the only criteria to talk about women’s problems. But women in general are better equipped to understand women’s problems and empathize with them.

It must be highlighted that there is only one woman reporter in the whole team and when asked whether the presence of a woman plays any role in giving women’s issues coverage she took some time to reflect. Recalling a report few months back on a destitute woman roaming near the TOI building she pointed out that it was covered by Anu. But cross check it with Anu what prompted her to cover a story on a destitute woman which would otherwise have gone
unnoticed, she says, 'it was in fact one of my male colleagues who asked me to give her a coverage. He thought that because I am a woman I can have better access to her. It was not deliberate.” And she revels that there was no serious engagement with that cause and the story was used as a filler material. It will be dishonest if I claim I covered that story because I am a woman. I have never done a women centric story so far as there is no space for such stories. But it is true that being a woman I am more sensitive and while reporting I do try and give a gender dimension to each issue.”

**Relationship with male colleagues**

The relationship with the male colleagues is in some ways restrained as there is a clear-cut division of men and women in the profession. Men are in a way protective and in some other ways envious of the advantages women avail being women; both of which perceived as a drawback by the women respondents. Male female segregation is bluntly acknowledged in the office set up. The women journalists acknowledge the fact that being a woman in this profession stands as a set back in this profession and the management makes no bone about pointing at that fact, though somewhat in a different fashion.. The management and those in senior position are quite protective about their female colleagues and would take all precaution of not giving any tough assignment to them, which would demand extra hours of work or involves hazardous travelling. “Women working in our set up are not as assertive or courageous as one encounters in the English press pertaining to their cultural conditioning and limited exposure. We are quite aware of this and have always been considerate
in understanding their problem and assigning them trivial’ (asaan) work.’ “It is a myth to talk of equality and it is a fact that men and women are different and should be treated differently,” points out Balmukund Sinha, quite assertively. He goes on to add, “I still don’t understand why women always talk of equality even when all is fine.” “It is not the equality but the equality of opportunity women are talking about.” My frail attempt to correct his understanding would be strongly disrupted, “do you think if all the work that is assigned to men out here will be managed by the women given the social set up? We are experienced people and understand the dynamics of the society and are considerate about the problems women face back home or in the society. Certain amount of protection to women is only but healthy.” He would conclude with a finalty. And Bhasa would contest this point, “behind the veil of this protective attitude hides the deep routed male chauvinism manifesting the patriarchal set up. Women in this profession may be seemingly conventional in their sense of dressing and submissive attitude but it must be highlighted that they are quite capable of handling any kind of job assigned to them. The very fact that despite the pressure faced in Hindi journalism few of us have made it to the office proves that we definitely have that killer instinct. (I must add that women journalists in Hindi Press definitely are faced with much more pressure than that of their counterparts in English Press because of their limited representation etc.) Has the management ever come out of its mistaken presumption and asked the women journalists to cover something hazardous that they have not been able to handle?” pointing out the management decision
to shift her along with another female colleague to the features desk (known for carrying all that is frivolous) after few months of their joining she agitatedly added, “last year they appointed two women journalists as a token representation and initially we were assigned to work in the news desk. I am sure the management would agree we were performing pretty well and liked the job as well. But suddenly as features desk went understaffed the management took a conscious decision to move both of us to the features considering our what they called ‘drawbacks’ for being women.” It definitely reveals more than the argument given by the management and nobody would buy their argument of being sensitive to women’s problem after cross checking it with Namita, the other journalist shifted to the features desk. To quote her, “there is no denying the fact that women journalists are not taken seriously. Ideally journalists should be first assigned to work in the feature and then moved to the news desk. But in our case it was reverse. And yes, it is all because we were women. We were performing quite well in the news desk and the management had never complained against our performance either, which would have made us feel inferior. But when it came to shifting some of us to the features desk to fill up the gap there the management moved both of us because we are women. This is deliberate and I don’t think the management would refute this point.” She however adds, “There is always this understanding about women journalists that they are not very ambitious career wise and don’t take their job seriously.” And how serious are women journalists really about their career. A lot of things come in between women’s
pursuing with their career, which we are all aware of. Firstly, the job is quite erratic and demands odd hours of working. Secondly, after marriage the whole dynamics change. Marriage is accompanied by physical displacement. And marriage also crippled the career prospects of Indian women in many ways as their being proved to be successful housewife and daughter in law. Anu Jain, the only woman reporter in this set up hesitantly adds, “I have been with the Navbharat Times for last nine years and I am the only one sticking to the profession till date. There have been always four to five women journalists here, when one leaves somebody else would fill up the blank. Women don’t stick to this profession for long for some reason or the other. Mostly, family responsibilities overpower the career ambition.” Manjula however points out that her relationship with her male colleagues has been quite healthy, though it has never been beyond professional. It is better to maintain some distance from men in order to stay away from any controversy. She follows the conventional argument. Anu however revels more. “Crudely speaking, men working in a Hindi Press are much more inhibited about certain things than that of English Press journalists. You may still feel there is a sense of discomfort among my male colleagues to discuss things openly with me despite my being with them for years together. I always feel more women in this set up would help these guys open up and help make the situation healthier.”
Emerging Scenario

During my eight months fieldwork in the print media as a researcher I came across a lot of insightful data that gives a perspective to the women’s engagement with mass media

- Commercialization of print media industry has significantly constrained the space given to the human-interest stories. In an era where space is sold on the basis of its marketability, politics and sensationalizing of news stories have become the norm of the day and these issues are projected as relevant issues and are given the maximum space where as human interest issues are sidelined as soft issues. However, the very notion of ‘relevance’ needs to be examined in this context. What is often been defined as stable and important news need not necessarily be an empowering or enlightening experience for the larger society. For example, if a newspaper at random is scanned for the purpose, it may be observed that routine events like the Head of a political party addressing a press conference, or publication of a lead photograph of a celebrity inaugurating a fashion show eats up the larger share of space where as socially relevant concerns like activist Medha Pathekar organizing tribal women for dignified rehabilitation or women’s groups articulating their dissenting voices against the patriarchal social order would be sidelined. In other words, the newspapers’ space often allows itself to be used for utilitarian political or market interest.
There is lack of serious engagement by the print media in general and the journalists in particular to give women's issues an insightful coverage. The news stories on women are generally factual and are produced as mere crime reports without any sensitive angle to it. What strikes us as sociologists is the very presentation of the news like rape, dowry or other forms of domestic violence merely as an object of police file or law and order problem. Presenting such news as just a 'legal fact' is not really conducive to the restoration of the dignity of women as equal partners. Instead the hidden meaning of this kind of presentation is often the objectification of women and generating a sensational temper that further reduces women to an object of male gaze and desire.

The visibility of women professionals has increased dramatically in comparison to its past trend, and women journalists are seen to be covering all kind of stories and taking adventurous assignments. sociologically this is a significant event to be noticed. The increasing visibility of women in a public sphere like a newspaper is definitely encouraging and illuminating. It helps break barriers and dualities and forces the printing press, even though not so easily to listen to the other voices emanating from women professionals. There is indeed articulation of this positive change. Women are becoming vocal in the print media, gender pages are appearing, slowly but steadily feminist voices are getting a space and some sort of gender sensitivity is developing in the work place. But then, our findings suggest that there is
no reason to be overwhelmed by this fact because there are innumerable constraints relating to the very philosophy of definition of ‘relevant’ news, its classification and prioritization, its style of presentation and the larger patriarchal mind set that is often internalized even by those who are expected to alter the society. Furthermore, it should not be forgotten that the number of women journalists is relatively less compare to that of men and in higher decision making position the ratio is even lower. Class and social status play a significant role in deciding on an occupation as challenging as journalism. It is observed that most of the women journalists come from upper middle class educated supportive families with a public school, metropolitan background, and admit that it is their education and the family upbringing, which is the determining factor in choosing their profession that overshadows their gender status. Family responsibility for women is perceived to be more important than that of their work, which curtails their avenue to an extent. In comparison, as has been identified, men don’t face such hurdles. Being a woman, give the professionals a perspective to cover women’s issues in a sensitive manner, for, they can relate to women’s problems better. But they strongly resist against reducing them to a category (i.e. women journalists) on that basis. Being merely a woman does not make one equip enough to relate to women’s problems. It requires much more involvement that that. This is indeed a sensitive issue. It is a fact that women’s issues have to be articulated. And possibly women themselves
because of their experiential domain want to articulate their experiences more softly and more frequently. But then there is a danger of stereotypes and reduction of women professionals into mere 'feminist' journalists. This classification, as our findings suggest, can prove to be quite problematic. 'Non-feminist' journalists would categorize 'feminist' journalists not complete professionals but as only those who write about women's issues. This would mean discouraging them from covering other issues which have often been projected as the real stuff of the newspaper i.e. politics, business and economy. Possibly there is only one way out of the crisis. It is to redefine the very notion of women's issue. Women issues are not just about patriarchal violence and objectification of women. It is eventually a perspective, a world view, a well articulated political approach to look at diverse phenomenon varying from economy, sports, international trade, family, culture and sexuality. That is why it is absolutely possible for a talented journalist, be it man or woman, to cover a hard' issue like the kargil war and narrate the story of, say, widows, infants and mothers who have lost their children. It is like covering war from a more humane and gender sensitive perspective. The crisis with the existing print culture is that it fails to develop an integral philosophy of this kind. It has to be seen whether with the entry of more and more talented and educated women in the field this culture gets altered and women's issues far from remaining ghettoized become sheer human issues.
Women journalists, esp. in English Press have gone a long way and have achieved their desired status in the industry. They no more feel discriminated against on the basis of their gender. Attitude of the English Press towards the women journalists is gender neutral, if not gender sensitive, acknowledge the journalists interviewed. However, male female segregation in its subtle level in the work front is experienced and elaborated by the respondents.

The findings suggest that unlike an English newspaper, a Hindi newspaper is more restricted. It is not comfortable with the changing reality i.e. seeing women as equal colleagues at work place. Possibly the cultural matrix of the northern India in which the Hindi press has to be situated is relatively more conservative and patriarchal. But then the Hindi press because of its organic linkage with the vernacular tradition is better qualified to address to the larger society. The Hindi press can generally unfold its potentials if it also begins to learn how to fight the patriarchal mindset and become sensitive to gender and other human issues. Because it should not be forgotten that it is in this belt that some of the pathology of the patriarchal violence is manifested more regularly and more brutally. It is however revealing, as our findings suggest, despite these constraints women professionals in the Hindi press wish to fight their battle and express their immense sensitivity to the challenge confronting the female population of our society.
We are awaken to a new question at this juncture. The arrival of television has brought a new dimension to the media culture. The programme materials of television are qualitatively different from that of the newspaper. A newspaper deals with prints and words and it demands a reader’s engagement and interpretive understanding. It is somewhat an intellectual exercise and requires a level of literacy. Thus, in a country like India, where there is huge domain of illiteracy, the readership of newspaper is restricted to limited sections of the society. Television, on the other hand, is about words, colours, visuals and images. It takes us to an experiential domain. It is in that sense more seductive and possibly more democratic in the sense that it can be accessed by all sections of the society. Television with its spot reporting, live shows have proved it more real, more up to date and more factual. But then television is also about a way of seeing. Not seeing itself. It is a way of interpreting, not objectivity itself. Television also has its priorities emanating from its visual logic. As the visual experience becomes primary, images need to look presentable, salable and attractive. It is therefore not surprising that with television music, sports, politics and entertainment acquire an overwhelmingly powerful visual dimension. Musicians need not simply be talented. They need to have an attractive appearance which is presentable to the audience sitting before the TV set. and even political spokespersons have to be tele genic to make their presence felt on the screen. Television also creates spectacular images. War, sports, earthquake, flood, everything tend to get reduced into a spectacular image that has its tremendous impact on the vulnerable mind. On
the one hand, it makes us react and react very sharply to the tragedies. All those who have watched the 9/11 attack on the world trade center or the recent Tsunami effect have possibly felt and got disturbed by the intensity of the human tragedy. These impacts are more direct and penetrating than reading it in print. But then, the over indulgence of television in these images also desensitize the viewers to an extent. As we see more and more deadbodies on the television set we also tend to become more insensitive to death as an existential reality. Moreover, television has reduced us to passive viewers and consumers of images. Events ranging from war to famine to Olympics to fashion shows are perpetually received and consumed as media spectacle. It on the process becomes some kind of passive entertainment, which is based on the tragedy of other people. In India with information revolution and highly elevated satellite technology, television has indeed become a reality. From the remote village to the urban slum, television antennas are shown everywhere and indicate an interesting sociological fact that television has indeed occupied a center stage in contemporary media induced culture. It is in this context that the next chapter, which is covered on television, becomes relevant.