

ROLE AND STATUS OF WOMEN IN THE PROFESSION OF JOURNALISM

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Abstract: This paper is an attempt to understand the role and status of women in the profession of journalism of Assam. To fulfill this objectives a considerable number of women working in the field of print and electronic media of Kamrup district of Assam has been taken into consideration. Which gives an idea about the power and position women enjoys in the profession of journalism.

Keywords: Women, profession, journalism, Role and status

Introduction

Role and status of women has been a matter of concern since time immemorial. Once there was time when role of women was limited to household activities only. But gradually things started changing; women started coming out from the household activities in search of better avenues and financial position. The financial position of men and women plays a decisive role defining the status. Thus they tried to involve themselves in various professions including those which were basically considered as the profession of men only. Though it is not clear when women started involving themselves in the profession of journalism but invention of movable printer in Germany by John Gutenberg during 1440s has been considered as a landmark here. It has opened up new avenues. Later on, this was fueled by the industrial revolution of Great Britain; inventions of number of machineries as well as advancement of technology had boosted the communication system that indirectly helped printing industry to spread its market all over the world.

Methodological Implication

It is an empirical study and the design of the research is strictly exploratory. The domain of the study is concerned with women in the profession of journalism of Assam. In this context, 100 women working in different capacities in print and electronic media of Kamrup (Metro) district of Assam were selected purposively as respondents for the study. Majority of the women work for private media organizations across the Guwahati city; only a few are engaged in government owned media houses. To fulfill the objective of the study the women media persons belonging to the different age group (18 and above) were considered as respondents to collect the data. All the respondents comprises of different segments of news media. There are 50 respondents each from print and electronic media irrespective of

caste, creed and religion. Significantly, before collecting the data a pilot study has been completed through which the feasibility of the study in both the media were tried to understand. The data were collected from primary and secondary sources. In light of secondary information the official documents, various texts, magazines and related books were used properly. At the same time a research diary was also used which provided many fruitful guidance and information regarding the present study. On the other hand, the qualitative and quantitative research strategies have been followed and structured questionnaires were used as techniques of data collection. Apart from this some personal interviews were also taken. As the design of the study is exploratory, no hypothesis has been formulated.

Selection of the Respondent

Out of 250 media professionals working in different positions across the State of Assam comprising print and electronic media, 100 women from Kamrup (Metro district) have been selected randomly for this purpose. These include 50 each from print and electronic media. Out of total 100 respondents there are 38 married and 62 unmarried women. In print media number of married and unmarried women is 27 and 23 respectively. And in case of electronic media it is 11 and 39 respectively. These women are working in various positions including reporter, sub-editor, news anchor, correspondent and others. Most of these women belong to the age group 25-45. However, a few of them cross this limit. The women who have spent at least one year in the profession of journalism (as a regular staff) in Assam have been selected as a respondent here.

Social Background of the Respondents

In these study respondents comprises from joint family and nuclear family. There are 87 (87%) respondents from nuclear family and rest 13 (13%) from joint family. It is observed that respondents are from diverse background. There is variation in monthly income of these families. The number of families whose monthly income is limited within rupees 5000 -10000 is 20 (20%). Number of families whose monthly income is between rupees 10,001 – 15000 is 28 (28%), while 34 (34%) such families are there whose monthly income is in between rupees 15001 – 20000. On the other hand there are 10 (10%) such families whose monthly income varies from rupees 20,001 – 25,000 and the number of families whose monthly income is more than rupees 25,000 is 08 (08%) only. Out of 100 respondents there are 20 (20%) respondents from General Caste, 34 (34%) from Schedule Tribe (ST), 16(16%) from Schedule Caste (SC) and 30 (30%) from Other Backward Caste (OBC). It is also observed that there is variation of educational qualifications as far as parents of the respondents are concerned. Out of these 100 respondents, majority of them i.e. 98 (98%) practice Hinduism, and 02 (02%) practice Islam as their main religion.

Role and status of women working in print media

The study shows that there are significant difference occurs in case of women in comparison to men working in news media. This difference is visible in terms of duties and responsibilities assigned to men and women. According to this study most of the women are engaged either in the City page or State page of the newspaper. Out of 50 respondents working in print media the number of women engaged in both of these pages are 20 (40%) each. While asking about the reason behind the maximum number of women engaged in both of this pages of a news paper, the 7 (35%) of them had said that in comparison to the front page, editorial page and other pages city page and State pages are considered as less important by the management, that is why they prefer women for this segments as in their opinion women are more suitable to such pages. On the other hand there are 5 (25%) such respondents who said that management don't want to deploy women in the lead role that is why they are assign duties in either city page or State page mostly. Out of these 20 number of respondents 4(20%) of them said that women are not willing to take heavy duties that is why they willingly choose their role in this manner. Further, 3 (10%) of them said that at present they are engaged in either of these pages but it changes on regular interval and they don't have any objection over that. And rest one (5%) respondent did not say anything in this regard. This is followed by National Page 5 (10%), Front page 4 (8%) and Editorial page 1(2%). It is interesting to found that out of these women not a single woman are allotted duties related to Sports page or sports related items. This outcome signifies types of roles and responsibilities women need to undertake in print media organization. The data shows that highest numbers of women are engaged either in the City page or State page of the news paper which are considered as less important in comparison to front page or editorial page of a news paper. On the other hand only a few numbers of women are engaged in front page and editorial page. This signifies that most of the women are acting on subordinate roles of news paper.

While asking about the specific bit of reporting or writing for the newspaper, it is found that maximum numbers of women are deputed in news gathering or reporting with respect to socio-cultural items. Out of 50 women 37 (74%) are engaged in this section. Rest are allotted duties in the following manner; 6 (12%) in political, 4 (8%) in crime and law and order and 3 (6%) in business and economy related news items. Not a single women work for sports section of the newspaper. Out of 50 women engaged in various segments of a newspaper only a few of them are deputed to cover political and law and order related news items, which are considered as important segments of a newspaper. Even, only a few numbers of women are engaged in business and economy related news items. The study shows that in print media the role of women is limited up to certain extent though their number is not negligible.

The study found that most of the women are working in the newspaper as a reporter. Out of 50; there are 43 (86%) respondents that have been working as a reporter and rest seven women (14%) are engaged as sub-editor of the news paper. While asking about their level of satisfaction towards their specific role of the concerned newspaper; 23 (46%) respondents said that they are happy with their assigned role. On the other hand rest 27 (54%) responded had replied negatively. Out of 23 respondents

who said that they are happy over their role in the media organization; mostly they are engaged in desk – related job. Further they stated that they do not have any dissatisfaction regarding their role as their duty schedule is fixed. So, they can plan their time schedule maintaining a good balance between their personal and professional work. The respondents who expressed their dissatisfaction over the assigned work are basically engaged as a reporter. Principle factor of their dissatisfaction include unpredictable time schedule and lack of facility for odd hours of work. This include pick up and dropping facility, healthy canteen and hygienic toilets and comfortable rest room facility inside the office premises.

Role and status of women working in electronic media

The study found that out of 50 women 27 (54%) works as news reporter, 15 (30%) works as Reporter cum News Anchor and 8 (16%) works as sub-editor. The study shows that though the women working in the electronic media almost need to do the similar type of duties and responsibilities but they enjoy glamour in this platform. This is not happens in case of women working in the print media. In response to the quarries in this regard 37 (74 %) respondents said that this is basically due to very nature of audio-visual media which is considered as more attractive and powerful than print media. While 7 (14%) respondents said that it is basically their personality because of what they enjoy power and status in this profession. On the other hand 4 (6%) responded had credited their professionalism behind their success. In the opinion of rest 2 (4%) respondents they enjoy reasonable status in the news media because of their credit worthy work, professional ethics and good managerial skill.

At the same time we should not ignore the type of role played by women in electronic media. According to this study maximum numbers of women (54%) are engaged as a news reporter which signifies that role of women is limited in non-executive positions mostly. Out of these women not a single one has been found who enjoys higher status in the news organization as editor or executive editor. Next to the reporting their role is basically limited as reporter cum news anchor. The study supports this stand having presence of 30% women (out of total population) in this segment. On contrary to this the study did not find a single woman out of these 50 women who enjoys executive role in the electronic media.

This signifies that though women are working hand in hand with their male counterparts in the profession of journalism but their works are primarily limited to news gathering and presenting as well as sub-editing the same for broadcasting. Their role is missing in managerial position that acts as gate keeping for media. Indirectly, we can say that despite of presence of women in the profession of journalism, basically, the news media runs under the command of men.

Concluding remarks

Media works as a mirror of the society be it in printed form or electronic form. Number of women has adopted this as a suitable career option in 21st century world. From this study we come to know that despite of presence of considerable number of women in the profession of journalism in Assam, only a few of them enjoying the power and status. Most of the women are working in those roles which are not considered as important as the role played by men in the media industry. Primarily, women are assigned for soft bits and men are for hard bits. This suggests that certain roles seem to be gender specific in case of news media also. Less number of women's participation in important positions signifies the same. Still, women are not considered as suitable for all the roles. In this context, one can understand the type of power and position of women in media industry. The study shows that though women are an integral part of the news media at present but most of the women's role is limited to socio-cultural segments including life style and fashion. Most of the women are engaged in these segments. On the other hand, only a few women are engaged in those sections which are considered as outmost important for a news organisation. These include political, crime and law and order related issues, business and economy related issues, etc. It is surprising to see that in sports segments women participation is almost zero. The study did not find a single woman that work for sports section. Now the question arises despite of presence of large number of women in the media industry why men play a dominating role in the profession of journalism? Why women are not being able to enjoy power and position the way their male counterpart do? Is it because of the patriarchal nature of Indian society or something else?

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