

Part I Report on National Press Day Celebrations 2008

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Introductory Note

November 16 the National Press Day is symbolic of free and responsible press in the country and is observed by holding Seminars/symposia/workshops/debates/discussions on topics relating to the press throughout the country.

The National Press Day, 2008 this year was dedicated to **'Women and Media'**. The National Press Day Celebrations were inaugurated by Her Excellency Smt. Pratibha Devisingh Patil, President of India at Vigyan Bhawan. To mark the occasion, a Souvenir on the subject was also released by Mr. Justice G.N. Ray, Chairman, Press Council of India. Hon'ble Minister of State for Information & Broadcasting and Parliamentary Affairs was represented by Ms. Sushma Singh, Secretary, Information and Broadcasting.

A number of distinguished and eminent personalities including veteran journalists, jurists and legal experts took part in the inaugural function.

Text of addresses delivered during the occasion follow.

Welcome Address
By
Mr. H.N. Cama*

Madam Excellency Rashtrapatiji, Mrs. Pratibha Patil, Hon'ble Secretary, I&B, Mrs. Singh, Justice Ray, Mrs. Bhargava, fellow colleagues of the PCI, Ladies and Gentleman,

It gives me immense pleasure today to be able to stand here to welcome our most lovable President who happens to be here from a state i.e. currently in the news perhaps for some very peculiar reasons and I hope there is no hesitation out here because she is a Maharashtrian in a North Indian State. When Mrs. Bhargava asked me whether I would welcome the Hon'ble President mixed feelings came to me because perhaps memories are walk took me back to 1968-69 when madam President were the Minister in Maharashtra State Government and we had the pleasure of hosting a dinner for you at our residence and at that dinner my father as a parent put to you a problem that he had and i.e. my sister had got admission in a medical college out of Bombay and he asked you madam what he should do? Should he sent a girl from a protective home to study medicine out of Bombay and as a young boy I still remember your words to my father to say please go ahead because women must work doubly have to achieve what men do in this country and today I am extremely happy to see that same gracious lady who graced our home 40 years ago is today leading the finest country on this god's good earth.

So, welcome madam and thank you for being with us.

* Member, Press Council of India

Address
By
Mr. Justice G.N. Ray*

“There is no chance of the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly on one wing.”

- Swami Vivekananda

The most significant and longest social movement continuing is movement for emancipation of women. Though the primary goal for women empowerment is to improve the quality of life of women but it has also deep ramifications in social, economic and political scenario of body polity. The media through its reach to people at large has been instrumental though not to the extent desired in supporting the movement for women emancipation by focusing neglect and marginalization of the position of the women in society.

It sounds intriguing how from a highly dignified position in India's mythic history, the woman in India has been relegated to a secondary position. The vested interests of the ruling elite and the male lobby influenced by alien cultures legitimised woman as an individual of little consequence.

It would be a sad commentary on the subordinate role of women in India when woman is ideally viewed as *Shakti* (Power), the origin of power itself but in reality found as helpless, hapless woman without any identity except that of a wife, or the mother who has very little voice in decision making and has very little by way of her own basic choice. Although discrimination against and exploitation of women are global phenomena, their consequences are more tragic in the some parts of the globe particularly in under developed countries where, ignorance, deprivation of the basic necessities of life, and the ever-growing pressure of transition from tradition to modernity- all combine to aggravate the inequalities that women suffer to a point at which their existence is reduced to a continuous battle for survival.

*Chairman, Press Council of India

Improving the status of women is regarded as the key to narrowing the gender gap and achieving a better quality of life.

Women are under great social control and scrutiny which has restricted what they can say and where and to whom. Cultural moves in almost every social set-up determine women's socialization in no uncertain terms. This has an important bearing on their ability to communicate and express their thoughts.

To discuss women empowerment it is necessary to deal with the present situation of women in India. I would like to briefly discuss certain key aspects related to the women which media should adequately cover and facilitate the process of empowerment of women.

Gender Inequality

A vast majority of Indian women work through out their lives but the fact is that it is not officially recognized. Statistics on work force shows low figure of women workers. There is a serious underestimation of women's contribution as workers even though when given a chance they have convincingly proved their ability. Women's workforce participation - the percentage of adult women who are actually working is accepted indicator of women's status and component of the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) used in GNDP Human Development Reports. According to a survey conducted by NCW covering over 1200 women in both organized and unorganized sector it has been found that 50% experienced gender discrimination by way of physical and mental harassment of women at work. The survey reported discrimination not only in salary but also in promotions, work distribution and working hours. Promoting gender equality was identified by the Government as priority strategic goal for the UN System in India under UN Development Assistance Framework. We should not forget that Gender Equality is not just a women's issue. It is an issue for the nation.

Wage discrimination

Women generally earn a far lower wage than men doing the same work. In no state in India women and men earn equal wage in agriculture. This is equally applicable to other areas of works such as mining, trade, transport services etc. In the various work sectors average wages earned by male is more than the wages earned by female.

I would emphasize on the findings of UNDP which were published as Human Development Report concerning gender equality. It says: "Women's work is greatly undervalued in economic term. The value of household and community work transcends market value."

The media can certainly bring some of these biases in to light. Specially, women journalists must take up this cause. The Indian constitution makes it mandatory to give equal protection to every citizen. Thus sympathetic media, judiciary and executive should stand for this together. Reform movement too is necessary in this regard.

Crime against women

The soaring crime rates and violence against women in the country reflects women as weaker sex who are being dominated and exploited. They face violence inside and outside the family throughout their lives. The Crime Record Bureau of India's website shows that in the year 2006 (latest data available on website) total crime reported against women was 1, 91731. Police record shows that a woman is molested in the country every 20 minutes; a rape occurs every 34 minutes and every 43 minutes an incident of sexual harassment takes place. Every 43 minutes a woman is kidnapped and every 93 minutes, a woman is killed.

Before empowerment of women can be achieved it is necessary to enable women to give voice to their experience, their sufferings, and for society to understand them as human being and respond to them with sensitivity.

Under Representation in important position

Women are under represented in governance and decision making positions. At present women represent approximately 8-9% of Parliamentary seats and less than 6% of cabinet positions. Less than 4% seats in High Courts

and Supreme Courts are occupied by women. Less than 3% of administrators are women.

Health

Millions of Indian women simply lack the freedom to go out of the house in search of health services they need. According to National Health Survey – 2 only 52% women in India are not even consulted on decision about their own health. The antenatal and postnatal care are beyond the reach of many Indian women. The National Health Survey – 2 estimate mentions that some 1,00,000 to 1,20,000 women die every year due to pregnancy related causes. In some States death rate is quite high and alarming. The rate in India is quite higher than the maternal mortality rate surveyed in Cuba, China, Srilanka and Vietnam.

The majority of women go through life in state of nutritional stress. They are anemic and malnourished. Girls and women face discrimination within the family; eating last and least.

Gap on Male-Female Ratio

Men out number women in India, unlike in many countries where the case is otherwise. The main cause of the gap in the male female ratio is prevailing practice of female fetus killing specially high in Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan. In these states, the ratio is shockingly low as compared to other Indian states. Female infant mortality rates are higher than male infant mortality rates. Sample Registration System (2000) reveals that female infant mortality rate is 74 per 1000 live birth.

The mass media needs to focus on this health issue of women. The various scheme incorporated by the govt. requires wider coverage so that women especially from economically weaker section can be benefitted from them.

Women Education

Education of women enables them to set their own priorities, seek knowledge and information to make their informed choices. The literacy rate among women continues to be lower than those for men. As per data of 2004-2005 available with the National Sample Survey, literacy rate per 1000

amongst rural women is approximately 450 and amongst urban female is almost 700. If we view overall position, there has been a positive development and female literacy rate has gone up 50% as per the National Sample Survey 1997 report. Despite this progress more than 245 million Indian women can not read and write.

Only 50% of Indian women are literate as compared to 65.5% of men. Far fewer girls than boys go to school. Even if they are enrolled, many of the girl students drop out of the school. The female adult literacy rate in Malaysia, Srilanka, China, Vietnam, and Indonesia is more than 70% and higher than that in India.

Very recently on 13th November, 2008 it had been reported in The Telegraph on the basis of P.T.I. report that “ India is among the 20 countries where the gender gap is the widest, the Global Gender Gap Report 2008 has said. It holds the 113th position among 130 countries. India ranks 25th in political empowerment, 116th in educational attainment and 128th in health and survival. In economic participation and opportunity, India has been ranked 125th.

Media's Role in empowerment of women in India

Communication is extremely important for women's development and mass media play significant role. It is to be noted that growth of women's education and their entry into employment have contributed to the growth of media. In all spheres of life whether for controlling population growth, spread of literacy or improving quality of life for vast masses, women have crucial role to play. However, women can be expected to play this role when they become conscious of their strength and are not deliberately marginalised by male domination. In this context, media has an important role to play – to create awakening in women to achieve their potential as the prime movers of change in society. In today's world, print and electronic media play a vital role in effectively conveying message that needs to be conveyed.

Portrayal of women by the Media

By and large the media scene in India is that media does not address serious issues about exploitation and unequal treatment to women in different

spheres but is keen in reporting sex related incidents by way of sensationalizing news of atrocities on women. Thus instead of highlighting the exploitation of woman they end up becoming one of the reasons in increase of violence as their coverage more often than not tend to glorify the crime against women. It is true that media has brought to light, as never before, certain misdemeanours against women but in a very subtle manner it also perpetuated the stereotyped image of woman as a householder and an inconsequential entity in the traditional value system. Generally, women's problems never figure on the front page of a newspaper unless it is a gruesome murder or a case of rape. Newspapers even on women's page does not usually address relevant issues for women empowerment but reporting is concerned with beauty tips recipes, fashion syndrome etc.

It is unfortunate that there is lack of sensitivity among the newspapers in general to women and their problems. I would like to refer to the Study conducted by the Media Advocacy Group viz. "Violence against Women: Media Coverage and Representation". The Media Advocacy Group made the following recommendations on reporting violence against the women.

- (i) Media needs to take an extended, broader view of crimes against women. It has to be instrumental in conducting a social audit on factors responsible for increasing crimes, particularly against women and children, including indifferent investigative procedures, miscarriage of justice, and growing social impunity of the perpetrators of crime.
- (ii) It also has to be instrumental in creating an awareness among civil society of the causes and nature of the crime itself, and of the preventive measures.
- (iii) When treating these issues, media has to be extremely factual and empirical.

The study also stated that the only regulation that governs a sensitive reporting on this issue is that the rape victim's name should not be disclosed. Barring this, the study found that everything else is graphically reported. Often the victim's family name and address is cited, making a mockery in the

letter and spirit of the regulation. Though much of this violation and malpractice are committed by a small group of publications, others are spurred on to imitate and keep pace with the sensational trend. Therefore, I urge the media to take a serious look on the issue and do self-regulation and self-monitoring with extreme care and caution.

Aarushi murder case is another prime example of irresponsible and sensational reporting by the Media. The gruesome murder of a teenage girl for days have been the sound basis of increased TRPs of the News Channels. The media both electronic and print are morally and legally bound to avoid sensationalisation of news relating to victims of crimes. The Press Council of India had already drawn guidelines on the subject and appeals to media to follow them meticulously while reporting atrocities on women/child.

It is important for me to refer at this point of time to, also an important issue that greatly and gravely impacts women in overt as well as covert manner, the HIV/AIDS reportage by the media. The Press Council had focused on the issue way back in 1993 when the AIDS was treated as an incurable 'epidemic' and anyone who contacted it was pariah. The prime sufferers of such ostracization were the women, being treated as an important cause and carrier of the so-called disease.

Much water has flown down the ganges, since then and with medical advances, it has become necessary for the media to focus on the issue with not just a proactive but positive approach. Therefore, the Press Council has in consultation with the UNDP and the activists of the field redrawn the guidelines for media reportage that find place in the souvenir that is to be shortly released. I hope that guidelines, in the form of easy to refer 'Dos' and Don'ts' and detailed ones for indepth understanding of the issue, will find place on the desk of every media person and their coverage of the HIV/AIDS stories will help the world handle the issue with greater sensitivity.

Limited coverage in Media

Newspapers cover women's problems drawing the attention of policymakers to issues requiring immediate attention such as the adverse sex ratio, infant and maternal mortality, crime against women and the effects of poverty on women and their families. But this coverage is very limited with

the rest of the space occupied by cinema actresses, models, video jockeys (veejays) and the rich women and their hobbies. Many of the women's magazines are devoted to fashion, glamour, beauty aids, weight reduction, cookery and how to sharpen 'feminine instincts' to keep men and their in-laws happy. There are comparatively fewer articles on career opportunities, health awareness, entrepreneurship, legal aid, counseling services, childcare services and financial management. A study in this regard was conducted in Jharkhand, Chattisgarh, Uttaranchal, Uttar Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir. Two regional newspapers and two English newspapers were selected for the study. Prominent newspapers only publish 5% of women related issues and 8% are published on main page and remaining are placed inside. Study showed no importance is given to development issues of women. In the television serials women are the central characters, but they are portrayed largely as tormentors or the victims while the men very often take sideline and just seem caught in a web of unfavourable circumstances. Television culture has portrayed a breed of weak, indecisive men ensnared by sexy women when in reality men also play an active role in oppressing women in various ways including subjecting them to physical assault, rape, pushing them into the sex trade and even abandoning them. It is only desirable that serials should be close to reality and give message to the viewers where and how the society is going wrong.

This portrayal of women in media has led the National Commission for Women to recommend amendment in the Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition Act), 1986. The NCW wants to include new technologies like MMS and the electronic media and some which were left out side the ambit of the Act like posters and TV serials which perpetuate stereotypes of women. Explaining the reason for including soaps in proposed amendment in the Act, National Commission for Women has stated that "women are either being portrayed as Sita (Ramayana) or as Kaikayee (Ramayana) and there seems to be nothing in between the two extreme characters being shown in Soaps. Divorces, adultery are highlighted frequently in Soaps where characters break the law without repercussion."

Negative images or just portraying reality is not enough. Infact, it can often be harmful. It has been observed that sheer duplication of the dark side

of life can often lead to apathy and passivity. This can be avoided by depicting the positive images or success stories of women in whatever sphere they happen.

There is need to produce programmes that talk about income generating schemes for women. Unfortunately, in these kinds of ventures typical “womanly jobs” like papad-making, sewing, embroidery, pickles making etc. are propagated. Stress should be given on non-traditional skills which can break the myth that women are suited to certain kinds of jobs only. A systematic survey of the existing schemes (Government/non- Government) and presentation of the analysis and changes needed to upgrade the schemes which would make them more purposeful is essential.

The distance between women and media not only deprives the women of their right to information and knowledge but also keeps the women in the dark regarding the blatant misuse of the female and the distortion of the truth. Although the images of women as reflected by the different mass media in the country are not very different, it will be an interesting exercise to study how these images feed and reinforce the stereotypes.

The distortion of realities by the media has increased the gap of understanding between the different sections of society. Effective informative communication is one of the most important channels for the growth and development of women in the informal or unorganized sector, as without information regarding services and benefits available through legislation, government schemes, banks and voluntary organizations, women can hardly take advantage of them. Thus the media should take into consideration the following points.

- (i) The media must project the working women in the unorganized sector as worker and not merely as performing the duties of wife/daughter. They being major earners, they must be projected as producers and not merely consumers.
- (ii) The media should make deliberate attempts to not only project the problems of women in poverty, but should monitor in such a way that

conflicting role models are not depicted, nor derogatory references to their work are made.

- (iii) To improve content and coverage, coordinated efforts for increased interaction between NGO's, women's social action group, research organizations, institutes of mass communication, and the media personnel should be developed.

There are quite a few Reports findings on the complex issues relating to women empowerment. Very often the media come up with study on women related subjects which more often than not are driven by market forces. One study claims that women prefer men with hybrid cars while another says women are genetically devised to shop. Then there is a study which says women are more attracted to bad boy types. This reveals that women have become new research subject mostly in less significant areas. In fact, research is necessary to understand women in its potentiality to usher in a new era. It is difficult to distinguish between genuine research and studies that are gimmicks more so when news reports do not identify where these studies are coming from. A large proportion of the research findings published in major news outlets today is sensationally packaged to draw attention. This is where the media must step in to help readers to know relevant facts concerning women empowerment. It will be only appropriate if in the interests of full disclosure, they should make clear in their reports who was funding the study and which scientific journal published it. This information can help readers to decide for themselves which pieces of research are closer to the truth and which are not. Various studies were undertaken on the women and media to ascertain how the media portrays women and how the women related issues are presented, how much significance is given to them. Such study has revealed that issues pertaining to development of women are never emphasized adequately. Women are portrayed not for feminine beauty and artistic portrayal but for infusing sex appeal more often than not entering the arena of obscenity. It is necessary to have dispassionate in-depth study by social activists and media to ascertain why obscenity has risen so much in media. Unless there is any change in the social perception of women, it will be difficult to curtail obscenity in media.

Women Journalist in Media

In such a rapidly changing environment, women in media have a large responsibility in not only changing attitude towards women but also shaping public opinion. With women holding responsible position in newspapers or electronic media, their competency should extend to a wider area and a range of issues. More importantly, a woman journalist is expected to show more sensitivity to issues relating to women and to more meaningful insights and perspectives.

Like most professions, in the media too, women have struck out boldly, beating a path, which is both impressive and inspiring. The last five years have seen them pouring out into the mainstream, acquiring hitherto unattainable positions and proving their mettle, be it the print or the television media. In short, women have become indispensable in the field. Women's organizations and media groups must play an active role in promoting this change. It is heartening that a wide variety of women's media initiatives are making a positive impact.

Women have been latecomers in media profession owing to social, religious taboos which operated as social sanctions. The employment of women in media assumes crucial importance at this juncture of our economic development. Beside Independent Public Corporation of Media (DD&AIR), the private owners of TV channels with ownership of Terrestrial outlets and satellite up linking facilities in country itself have flourished. This has brought a boom in employment thereby increasing the percentage of women media professionals.

The rough estimates however show that although the number of women in both the media has increased in absolute terms, their ratio to men has more or less remained static. A deliberate policy for ensuring adequate representation of women both in the public and private sectors of the media is therefore a must, not only for giving women a source of livelihood but also to ensure their adequate and effective representation, and to make the media truly national and representative in character.

A significant number of women journalists are very successful in magazines dealing with various problems of women and child. With

sensitivity and skill for analyzing events in depth, issues such as women abuse and exploitation, harassment of women at workplace and the trauma of HIV infected women, female infanticide in rural areas find a prominent place in such magazines. The magazines deal with the issues more in depth compared to newspapers and women are considered competent to handle such stories. As per a study in the NCR there are around 900 women journalists and even in cities like Chennai the number is impressive 200. Journalism is no more a male domain. This new trend has also led to a change in the portrayal of women in the media in general and newspaper in particular. It will not be out of context to mention here the success of 'Khabar Lahariya'. A group of eight women belonging to backward class bring out this paper from the Bundelkhand region. This paper which is being funded by an NGO was started with an aim to encourage women to fight for their own rights. Such kind of initiative are required in every nook and corner of our country, so as to empower the women at grass root level.

The risks women in the media face, both in the urban and rural areas, have also to be seriously considered. As we move down, from the metropolitan towns and the state capitals, the risks increase. At the district and taluk levels, from where the bulk of the print media is published, and which are more news-worthy places for the local and regional news contents, there is more conservatism, more rigid social outlook and greater resistance to social change and new trends. In these areas women join new professions like journalism sparingly. In remoter rural areas a woman journalist and particularly a reporter is a novelty not easily accepted and assimilated in the social milieu. The result is media women have to work almost in isolation particularly at the ground levels, if they are at all employed. The cases of sexual assault and harassment of women reporters are very often reported. Women in such cases have to take a calculated risk in joining the profession. Odd hours of job make the women journalists vulnerable. Recent murder of Ms. Soumya Vishwanathan, Producer of News TV channel in Delhi shows women journalist workers are more exposed to the risk of physical assault, even their life.

It is noticed that more and more young graduates are joining the journalism degree and diploma courses, with an ambition to make a mark in

the profession, and quite a good proportion of them are girls. With the rapid expansion, almost a proliferation of the electronic media through satellite channels, with the popularity of the FM on the radio and with the growth of the print media, notwithstanding the electronic media, now there is a good scope for absorption of both men and women qualified journalists in various media outlets. Women, young and old, are prepared to weather the risks. The society, therefore, must make arrangements to provide adequate security to the vulnerable section of women in the media to promote their participation at all levels.

I find extremely appropriate here to refer to the recommendations made by the Joshi Committee regarding positive portrayal of women on Doordarshan. But these recommendations are equally relevant to all form of media. These recommendations, if followed in letter and spirit would certainly go in long way in enhancement of women's empowerment and facilitate drastic reduction in cultural biases as well as gender biases. They are

1. The women's issue one of the utmost significance to the country as a whole and there is need for a widespread understanding that the nation cannot progress, as long as women are left behind as the lesser half of society. Therefore, the improvement of women's conditions, status and image must be defined to be a major objective for media channels.
2. The Government must at the earliest formulate clear guidelines regarding the positive portrayal of women on television. This portrayal must take note of women in all facts of their lives: as workers and significant contributions to family survival and the national economy: it must further endeavour to integrate women on terms of equality in all sectors of national life and the development process. These guidelines must emphasis that the "women's dimension" must from an integral part of all programmes and not be merely confined to Women's Programmes, nor to isolated attempts to discuss women's issues.
3. The number of commercial formula films screened must be drastically reduced, the cheap song-and-dance sequence totally eliminated and the content of such programmes carefully scrutinized in terms of their portrayal of women.

4. Women must not be portrayed in stereotyped images that emphasize passive, submissive qualities and encourage them to play a subordinate secondary role in the family and society. Both men and women should be portrayed in ways that encourage mutual respect and a spirit of give and take between the sexes.
5. The foreign exchange resource should be spent on importing worthwhile educative programmes, particularly those that show the roles, lives and struggles of women in neighbouring and other Third World countries so that a greater understanding and a shared perspective on problems is built.
6. It is necessary to ensure that a large number of rural women gain access to TV. Therefore, in the placement of community TV sets preference should be given to the meeting place of Mandals; Mahila Mandals should also be involved in the community viewing arrangement.”

Everywhere the media has the potential to make a far greater contribution to the advancement of women. They can create self-regulatory mechanisms that can help to eliminate misleading and improper gender based programming.

Media, which wields immense power in a democracy - a power which is only expanding and not diminishing, needs carrying out a focused attention about women- related issues and the portrayal of women. It is, perhaps, necessary that the stabilizing force of women must be brought home to the Indian people. In every family and society, there is an ethical and spiritual space, which has been traditionally dominated by women. The principal character in Bernard Shaw's Pygmalion bemoans, 'why can't woman be like man!' The media can play a salutary and a liberating role to give to the women the distinctive and the exclusive space, which must belong to them to enable them to generate the ethical and moralizing impulses for the entire society.

The subject Women and Media is quite relevant in the present day context. From this platform the discussion on the subject is being initiated. The debate on this issue is being proposed to be discussed at the State level and the Press Council is keen that seminars and workshops on this subject are organised at different States and at different levels. I sincerely hope that this

initiative will be fruitful. Let this beginning be auspicious (Aiomaramba Subhaya Bhabatu).

Namaskar

**Address Delivered by Smt. Sushma Singh,
Secretary, I&B on Behalf of
Mr. Anand Sharma***

Hon'ble President of India Her Excellency Smt. Pratibha Devi Singh Patil ji, Chairman, Press Council of India, Justice G.N. Ray ji, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen. It gives me immense pleasure and honor to address all of you, the distinguished gathering, from the media as well as various cross-sections of the society, on the occasion of the National Press Day. First, I would like to congratulate the Press Council of India for its commendable job in preserving the freedom of Press for the last forty-two years when the Council was first constituted in 1966.

The Press Council of India, in keeping with its mandate to build up a code of conduct for newspapers, news agencies and journalists in accordance with high professional standards, has on the basis of its adjudications of cases from time to time, built up a code of journalistic norms. Though these codes have emerged out cases relating to print media, the fundamental principles evolved in the process are as much relevant to radio and television journalism.

National Press Day that is the 16th of November, is symbolic of free and responsible press in India. This was the day on which the Press Council started functioning as a moral watchdog to ensure that not only the press maintain the high standards expected from them but also that its freedom is not fettered by influence or threats of extraneous forces. I am happy to note that the Council has been able to achieve its objectives.

Indian society consists of diversified cultures, traditions and beliefs. Mass media's role as a social constructor and representative of people has greater responsibility in binding these complexities of culture and processes with the people of the society. In India, the status of women is undergoing a perceptible

*Hon'ble Minister of State for External Affairs and Information & Broadcasting

change. More and more women are entering into new fields which were so far supposed to be for men only. Educational levels are increasing and there is heightened awareness to fight discrimination. In such circumstances, I am pleased to note that the Council has chosen the topic 'Women and Media' for this year's National Press Day celebrations.

As I see it, there are two aspects to it, one concerning the 'role of women in the field of journalism' and the other pertaining to 'the portrayal of women in the media'.

Women in the field of journalism:

With increasing participation of women in both print and electronic media, over the years, it is seen that women today have acquired eminence in the field and occupy high position including those of editors and directors in leading media establishments. In the year 1996, women's participation in the Indian media was only 8%. At present there are 12% women journalists in the country.

During the 60's and 70's women started taking up career in the field of Journalism. At that time it was considered that women were fit only for soft journalism like writing, sub-editing etc. However, more and more women are now choosing hard core journalism as a career option. They are increasingly getting into the reporting stream and are willing to work in difficult situations such as war zones, scenes of crisis. Today journalism has become an exciting and interesting profession for women also.

Despite the progress made by women in journalism, gender bias in journalism continues. Several reports have revealed that women journalists are often discouraged by their men colleagues and bosses and do not get the desired co-operation. There have also been reports of sexual exploitation of women journalists. Women journalists are also often overworked and underpaid.

In many cases women journalists are denied promotion on flimsy grounds that they cannot do night duty. Which could be due to the fact that often managements do not provide them proper conveyance facilities or make adequate arrangements for their security.

The other difficulties faced by the women in media relate to:-

- Low employment of women in media particularly at decision making level.
- Lower pay compared to men journalists especially in higher position.
- Child minding care as with all working women is an important issue with women journalists. In fact a study has brought out that many women journalists have deferred marriage and pregnancy due to these problems. Further only 56.7% of those who have children avail maternity leave as they suffer from job insecurity.

'Portrayal of women in India'

Over the years, and especially during the last decade, India has developed a fairly extensive communication infrastructure. The subject of portrayal of women in Indian media especially cinema and TV soaps has drawn the attention of media critiques in present times.

The positive side of women's progress and their contributions in national development has not been adequately discussed in the media. Media portrays women in a stereotyped way. Women tend to be portrayed in terms of their physical appearance, not abilities. When they are not being portrayed as sex objects, women are most often shown as victim of violence; powerless or as subjugated homemakers. Although the portrayal of women as care providers has positive connotations, they are nevertheless stereotypes, which certainly do not reflect women's complex capabilities and aspirations.

Powered by fast changing technology with its vast reach, media is, one of the most powerful forces in influencing the way people think. Therefore, we have to move away from the portrayal of women as helpless and inferior, victims and objects for sexual exploitations. On the other hand, Media should be used as a tool to promote a positive and realistic image of women.

Media can convince other sections of the society about women's legitimate role and the space to be given to them. Above all, Media should not sensationalize women's issues but at the same time give adequate coverage to gender related problems such as dowry, bride burning, feticides etc.

It is further necessary for the media to campaign for, and assist individuals and organizations working for women in this field so as to multiply their efforts.

This object can be achieved by experience hearing and exposing them to success stories of women achievers in various fields.

Media can and must act as an empowering instrument, and play a crucial role in; educating women about their rights; their right to equal status in society; instill self-confidence in them; make them aware of their capabilities; inspire them to organize themselves for betterment of their positions and to collectively fight against injustice.

I once again express deep gratitude to give me an opportunity to be with you at this great occasion.

Thank you.

Inaugural Address
By
Smt. Pratibha Devisingh Patil*

Ladies and Gentlemen, I am very happy to participate in the National Press Day celebrations. November 16th is a day on which we can look with pride to the fact that we have been, in the last six decades since independence, successful in maintaining the freedom of our press. We have in this period also seen an extensive growth in the English language media as well as in almost all our regional language press.

The freedom of speech and expression is an important right of a citizen. It is also one of the requirements of a healthy democratic system and for creating an aware society. Mahatma Gandhi said and I quote, "One of the objects of a newspaper is to understand popular feelings and deep expressions. Another is to arouse among the people certain desirable sentiments. And the third is to oppose fearlessly their defects". Unquote. He used the three journals, 'Navjeevan', 'Young India' and 'The Harijan' to awaken political and social consciousness.

The media has today become more powerful than perhaps it has ever been before. Its reach is expanding all the time on account of the ever increasing advances in technology. It is no longer limited to one medium or platform but has grown from the print media to radio to the electronic media and, more recently, through the various internet options. Media in one form or the other, particularly the electronic media has dramatically penetrated into every home. In many ways, media is framing peoples' thoughts, aspirations and opinions and this means the responsibilities and duties of the media are increasing. While bringing news and all that is happening in society to the forefront, it must carry messages in a manner that helps in building a constructive approach. Media can contribute significantly to the process of socio-economic development and in our fight against social evils, which are major blockades and which hamper our efforts in accomplishing the goals of our great nation.

* Hon'ble President of India

The media holds a mirror to the happenings in society to the public at large and therefore, it must profile issues requiring attention. In this context, this year's theme chosen by the Press Council of India - "Women and Media" - is one that is, indeed, significant. One of the tasks we still have to accomplish in our country is the empowerment of women and gender equality. Women constitute about half of our population but still do not have the same opportunities as their male counterparts in many areas. Often there is discrimination against women and they are faced with many social biases that suppress their capacity to contribute their might towards building a strong nation. To help women realize their rights - political, economic and social institutions and structures would have to work in tandem.

Legislatures at the National and State levels have created laws for social welfare and greater participation of women in national life. Women have been given 33 percent representation in local bodies. However, while statutory declarations give rights, to make them effective there is need for awareness and responsive implementing and redressal mechanisms. Many stakeholders would need to work together to create an enabling environment in which women's concerns can be reflected, articulated and redressed. Media can be an important player in highlighting cases of success, which can act as a catalyst in the process as well in pointing failures, so that the defects in the system come to light and can be corrected.

With the phenomenal increase in the number of women entering the media over the past few years, many questions need to be answered and analysed. What is the status of women journalists today? Do they get the enabling environment to do well in their work? What facilities, such as childcare facilities and adequate leave for raising their children do women journalists get? What type of mid- service training do they receive? The need for introspection on these issues was highlighted in a survey conducted a few years ago, the findings of which revealed that women journalists felt they needed certain changes in the workplace such as childcare facilities, maternity leave, insurance, among others. No doubt from a historical perspective, women journalists have clearly made

great advances in the last two decades in India. They are reporting from the battlefield, the stock market and Parliament and the State Assemblies. There is also no doubt that women journalists have given the media a broader base by mainstreaming health, environment as well as social problems and women's issues. In a competitive profession like journalism, women naturally have aspirations to rise up the ladder, just as their male colleagues. These are some of the issues which can be looked at by managements of media organizations.

The other aspect with regard to "Women and Media" is how the media depicts women. The question is, does the media depict women in a positive way or are women shown more in a negative light? There are many qualities of a woman - as a mother, conscience keeper, protector of our cultural values as a friend and companion, which require more reinforcement today, than perhaps in the past. Is the media doing this? I remember the award winning film, "Mother India", in which the central figure was a woman who faced adversity with dignity and who imbibed these qualities in her child. This portrayal was so effective, that it left an impact on thousands of youngsters who watched the film, that when they grew up it probably influenced their attitude towards women. Are such films made these days? Do television and the print media adequately highlight the stories of women of courage and determination in adversity?

I would also like to turn to the role of the media in how it portrays the happenings around it. Our nation is going through an important phase in its evolution. A new India is emerging which is confident and its economic growth has caught the attention of the world. This wave of hope is led and reflected by the optimism of its youth. At the same time, no doubt, we do have problems. The media can interpret events in many different ways. The media's perspective should be constructive, just as a glass half empty, can also be seen in a different light - that is a glass half full. This in my view, would have positive run offs in the minds of the public and help in finding solutions. In this way, media can help in creating a public discourse which seeks solutions and generates hope and not in the dark light of skepticism. This can be an important role for the media - to inspire our people to higher sentiments and be responsible towards their roles and duties as responsible citizens who think in terms of how to protect the interests of our country. Many media channels have increasingly broken national

boundaries. It has resulted in many cross-cultural influences, some think it may lead to homogenization of culture and therefore the challenge is how to preserve cultural diversity. For a country like ours, with a rich and ancient cultural heritage, this will be a question of interest.

I would also like to touch on another aspect of the media in our times. It is well established that what news is worthy to reach the pages of the print media and the screens of news channels, is often a happening out of the ordinary. However, the media should carefully avoid sensationalizing these happenings, particularly when the incident involves the young, women or sensitive social issues.

With these words, I would like to conclude my address at this year's Press Day and wish the Press Council of India well in its work of ensuring that our media can continue to work in the best possible way and with high standards. As the role of media is very important in a democratic country, I wish the event all success.

Thank you,

Jai Hind

Vote of Thanks
By
Smt. Vibha Bhargava*

Mahamahim Rashtrapati Smt Pratibha Patilji, Hon'ble Chairman, Press Council of India, Mr. Justice Ray; Secretary, Information and Broadcasting Ministry, Smt. Sushma Singh; Mr. Cama and other Members of the Press Council; Hon'ble Justice Aggarwal; distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, it is my proud privilege to propose a vote of thanks to this eminent gathering at the inauguration of the National Press Day Commemoration. The Day this year debates at various fora the media's vision of one half of the population as a workforce as well as the target audience. Another and most important aspect of the debate is reflection of women in the media. The Hon'ble President of India has spoken eloquently on her expectation from the media in handling an issue so close to her heart, the empowerment of women and it is our earnest hope that the words of wisdom from the first citizen of the country will galvanize it to prioritize this task. That such awareness campaign may not remain the domain of serious news media and that the entertainment media can as well have a similar, if not greater, impact has been established by the recent run away of success of the tele-serial Balika Vadhu. On the issue of media as a work force I may be permitted to refer to the off-the-cuff remarks by a journalist of the Hindustan Times, Chitragada Choudhury who was given the Sanskriti Award this Friday. She said, and I quote, "I hope from this evening onwards, my mon won't ask me to leave this profession". Perhaps this one sentence says it all. Our sincere gratitude to you Your Excellency gracing today's function and for the insight into the role media can play in setting the agenda for the country.

*Secretary, Press Council of India

We also thank the Secretary, Information and Broadcasting, Mrs. Sushma Singh for representing the Hon'ble Minister of State Mr. Anand Sharma, who has been suddenly called away from Delhi. Mr. Sharma had been associated with the Press Council in late 1980s as a member from Rajya Sabha and has thus seen the Council's working from close quarters. His erudite address as Minister-in-charge delivered by the Secretary reflects his vast experience. Thank you Mrs. Singh for giving us the benefit of your presence at such a short notice.

Our sincere thanks to Hon'ble Justice Ray who as Chairman of the Press Council has made a meaningful difference to the ethical dimension of the Councils adjudicatory and advisory process. Before conclusion, a special thanks to Smt. Stuti Kacker, Additional Secretary, I & B who, who helped us tie-up the loose ends at the last moment and to the Press Council staff for their efforts.

I express my gratitude to all the distinguished personalities who have contributed to the souvenir that was released a while ago and to the audience whose presence indicates their support for a fresh look at media reportage of women related issues.

Thank you all.