

Women, Gender and Mass media in Nepal

By Binda Pandey

Background

The history of mass media in Nepal is not so long. It first started with a hand press in 1851 for the purpose of printing government documents and stamps. Publication of "Sudha Sagar", a monthly magazine, in 1891 marks the beginning of Nepali journalism. After twelve years, a weekly newspaper *Gorkhapatra* came into being, in 1901. In 1960, it was converted into a daily newspaper. The first state owned printing media corporation—the Gorkhapatra Corporation—was established in 1964. The publication of the *Rising Nepal* started in 1965. Since then, numerous newspapers and magazines have gradually hit the newsstands in Nepal. According to the registration record in 2001/02, there are 1620 dailies, weeklies and fortnightlies; 127 monthlies and 12 other kinds of newspapers and magazines published today. Among them, hardly a dozen of publications are edited by women.

In the electronic media sector, Radio Nepal was established in 1951 and it currently covers about 70 percent geographical area of the nation making it the most effectively accessed media. Nepal Television started to operate very recently, in 1985. Only about 17 percent of Nepali population has an access to electricity. It is estimated that only about 10 percent of the total population has an access to Nepal Television programmes. .

As consumers, women's access to print media is very low in rural areas as compared to that of their male counterparts. Their access to electronic media, especially to radio, is a little more than to the print media. It is through entertainment programmes rather than news and other analytical events. But this trend is being changed slowly.

Women's participation in media as actors and/or employees is very low. The percent of women's participation in the government owned media

was 12.3 in 1992. It increased to 12.9 percent in 1997 and 15.5 percent in 2002. The increment is mainly because of electronic media. But, the percentage of women's participation in print media has decreased sharply to 2.8 percent in 2002 from 13.4 percent in 1992. The details of the comparative study undertaken in 1992, 1997 and 2002 have been presented in the table below.

Table 1: Women's participation in government owned mass media

Media	1992		1997		2002	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Nepal TV	79.6	18.4	79.4	20.6	78.3	21.7
Radio Nepal	91.6	8.6	91.8	8.2	69.9	29.1
National News Agency	93.6	6.4	94.3	5.7	91.8	8.2
Gorkhapatra	86.6	13.4	89.5	10.5	97.2	2.8
Total	86.7	12.3	87.1	12.9	84.3	15.5

From 1995, the private sector entered into the domain of electronic media. Many FM radios and a few television channels came up in Kathmandu and outside the valley. According to the study conducted in 2002, women's participation is 21.7 percent in the government owned television whereas their participation in private channels is 68 percent. Similarly, 29 percent women are involved in Radio Nepal but in the private FM radios they occupy 38 percent.

Table 2: Women in electronic media

Employees by Sex	Govt. Television (Nepal TV)		Private TV (Channel Nepal)		Govt. Radio (Radio Nepal)		Private Radios (FM radios)	
Female	39	21.7	30	68.2	28	29.1	92	37.9
Male	141	78.3	14	31.8	142	69.9	151	62.1
Total number of employees	180	100	44	100	170	100	243	100

Women's participation in the government owned newspaper--*Gorkhapatra*--was 2.8 percent in 2002 while it was 10.6 percent in the private print media. But women's participation in decision-making positions is negligible both in government and private sectors whether print or electronic media, as shown in the table below.

Table 3: Women's participation in newspapers in both government and private sectors

Employees by Sex	National News Agency		Gorkhapatra		Private Papers	
Female	4	8.2	3	2.8	50	10.6
Male	45	91.8	103	97.2	423	89.4
Total number of employees	49	100	106	100	473	100

Women's Role in Media

Mass media in Nepal are not yet gender sensitive. Even the women participating in media are seemingly not aware of gender perspectives. As a result, matters written and projected by women are also not that sensitive.

In the media world, media people normally divide news matters as hard and soft matters. With this division starts discrimination. Women are hardly given a responsibility for hard news. Almost all women are engaged in soft sections, which are not considered as important in the media culture.

In electronic media, women are mostly projected in stereotype roles in advertisements, films, serials, dramas and other activities. According to a study, in 65 advertisements related with soaps, spices and kitchen items, only one was modelled by a male. All other 64 featured women as models. But, all the advertisements related to works other than household items were modelled by males (Thapa, 2000). This kind of presentation reinforces the conservative ideology that domestic matters are a concern of females and outside works are that of males. In addition, many proverbs subordinating women to men are rampantly used in the media of all types reinforcing the patriarchal worldview.

Women are hardly recognised as experts in any sectors despite the fact they are the real workers. There are hardly any opportunities available for women in terms of training and promotion. In most cases, women's recognition is tied to their male relatives. not to their power and ability. This is not to suggest that there are no efforts to bring about changes in gender perspectives but the fact is that policy makers are not paying any attention to this fact.

Women's Issues in Media

To look at content coverage in media, women's issues are not seen mainstreamed. According to a study, less than one percent space is given to women and gender related issues in news and views of the media (Thapa, 2003).

The painful experience with mass media is that when women are victimised by social evils and injustices, media project them in a manner that has a negative psychological effect. Media hardly expose the criminals involved. This kind of presentation affects women both in their personal and family lives. Unable to bear the impact of negative projections, women even commit a suicide. In 2002, a film star committed a suicide because of the psychological pain caused by her naked photo that was published in a weekly newspaper. Various authorities were consulted and cases were filed against the breach of privacy. But the case was dismissed without any action against the publisher.

Conclusion

The mainstream media are captured by males who seek to reinforce traditional attitudes towards women. A decade after the reestablishment of multiparty democracy, gender equality has not been mainstreamed. Like the state machinery, the media, which is considered as the fourth organ of the state, is not gender sensitive.

Women rights activists have identified many sectors, including media, that need gender sensitive orientations. To bring about changes in social attitude, state authorities should be gender aware, and they should behave in a gender sensitive manner when it comes to public duties and responsibilities. Similarly, media people should get gender sensitised through regular interaction programmes on gender and women's rights issues. Gender experts should be included in media censorship boards not only to censure a certain programme or broadcast but also to take proactive initiatives to introduce programmes necessary to bring about attitudinal changes amongst media professionals vis-à-vis gender issues and concerns.

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