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### BIAS, DISCRIMINATION AND HARASSMENT OF WOMEN JOURNALISTS: AN INDIAN MEDIA PERSPECTIVE

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#### ABSTRACT :

face challenges of different kind at home, at media offices and from the society. They have to be mentally strong and resolute to overcome the threats to their personal life and their professional career. Indian women journalists too are facing varied forms of discrimination, bias and harassment in their professional and personal life. The journalists, who are considered as the voice of the voiceless, themselves go voiceless at times and especially the women journalists become mute to their own problems.

Media, for over a century was purely considered as the male-domain and it took up to 1960s to allow the entry of women journalists into the profession of journalism. Though it is almost six to seven decades that women started entering into the field of journalism in India, the discrimination against them still continues in varied forms. This research paper aims at pointing out different types of discrimination against the women journalists within and outside the media houses in India. It is also aimed at highlighting stories of some of the women journalists who braved the odds and stood their ground in the recent past.

**KEYWORDS :** women, journalists, harassment, bias, discrimination.

#### INTRODUCTION :

It is widely perceived that there is a misogynistic attitude towards the women journalists in the world in general and in particular in India. Many organizations like Reporters Without Borders, International Network of Women Journalists, Press Institute of India, and National Commission for Women, India, etc., have carried out many studies to ascertain the status of women journalists in Indian and global contexts. The studies have clearly pointed out there is discrimination against the entry of women into the field of journalism, which is considered as the influential and change-making capable field. It takes special guts and strong determination and commitment for women to enter and survive in the field of journalism, especially in the traditional Indian system.

Though women started entering into the field of journalism in good numbers since 1960s, their percentage is still does not exceed 30 per cent in any Indian media house. Women do not get place of prime importance, especially those at the editor and bureau chief level. Their role in the policy making and decision-taking is also very low in the media.



When it comes to ownership of media, women constitute less than five per cent with regard to the media ownership in India. Though women started working in media in large numbers during the last one to two decades, the conditions have not changed up to the desired level in the country. The scenario is changing slowly and is turning positive as

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far as encouraging women to take up media jobs, but the harassment, bias and discrimination against them continues unabated at different levels and in the different forms.

In the recent past, one woman journalist named Rana Ayyub, an investigative journalist, was threatened and morphed videos of her were shown in bad light in the social media only to kill the spirit of journalism in her. She was subjected to horrible campaign of harassment online.

Another woman journalist, Lakshmi Subrahmanian, was subjected to unwarranted pat on her cheek by the Governor of Tamil Nadu. She got this uncalled for pat on her cheek for simply posing a question to the Governor about some allegations against him. She was also subjected to threats and caustic comments by unscrupulous politicians for finding fault with the touch of the Governor during a press conference.

It is said that they waged a relentless battle to be accepted in the so-called sacred newsrooms of the media and suffered misogynistic violence in the society that is of patriarchal mindset. In the opinion of Huff Post founder, Rituparna Chatterjee, journalism as a choice of career for women is still a risky venture. Parents do have apprehensions about the career prospects and growth for women in journalists and the risks involved in it.

Most of the times, parents do feel that women who work as journalists do not get good offers in the marriage market in the traditional Indian society. This clearly indicates that there is a lot of prejudice for women who want to take up jobs in journalism. There are many gender-specific issues and untold suffering for women in the field of journalism.

It has really become suitable for those who dare to venture. In sizeable number of cases, women journalists leave the profession, many times against their will, just because their husband or in-laws do not like the women going out and risking in the violent society. For many, journalism is still considered as not the cup of tea for women in the Indian setting.

The first generation of women who entered into the field of journalism in the early 60s had to show lot of courage and grit to take up the job and to continue in it. The early birds in the media field were looked at curiously and no one was sure as to how long they will continue in the field that is male-dominated till then. According to Usha Rani, who is considered as one of the country's first women journalists, many considered that women cannot survive long in a highly taxing profession like journalism.

Assignments that were given to the women journalists are often turned out to be soft and 'feminine.' One senior woman journalist pointed out that women were mostly assigned flower shows, canine shows, sari exhibitions and other celebrity and lifestyle events rather than the hard stories that demand physical exertion and tough mental attitude.

Popular television journalist Burkha Dutt stated that she had to work twice as hard to get to the same position as her male colleagues did. It was after special requests and hard fights that she was given assignments to cover war and conflicts.

Sexual harassments have become weapons of revenge, subjugation and exploitation of women in the field of journalism. Many women journalists have started complaining against those who subjected them to sexual harassment during their media jobs. Mostly it is the editor level or others in senior editorial positions and their colleagues who try to and do harass the women journalists in the media houses.

A young woman journalist had exposed Tarun Tejpal, the editor of Tehelka magazine, for assaulting her in a Goa hotel. The exposure and the fight of the woman journalist have attracted the national headlines.

Police too have carried out violence against women journalists in many instances. In Mumbai's financial district, a woman photo journalist was gang-raped. Many protesting women journalists were allegedly groped by the police.

In the recent past, courageous women journalist Gauri Lankesh, was shot dead outside her residence in Bengaluru for raising her voice against fundamentalism and against the illegal mining in the State.

Women journalists are facing the worst form of online trolling and vicious comments many times exceeding all the limits of decency. Under anonymity of social media many people who are perpetrators of

crime are targeting women journalists for their courageous exposure of illegal activities in the society. The physical threats and mental harassment have become commonplace for women journalists.

All in all, the working conditions, family support, outside response to the women journalists do not augur well for the gender equality in taking up of the professions of their interest. The women who enter into journalism have to be doubly sure that they need to fight battles of different sort to continue and survive and thrive in the field of journalism.

#### **CONCLUSION:**

Women are facing discrimination even before their entry into the field of journalism and their decisions to enter into this challenging field is considered unconventional and risky and bold at the same time. They face unfavourable conditions at the home, office and in the society during their work as journalists. Though the things are moving in a positive direction as far as the number of women taking up of journalism jobs, there is lot to be desired as far as the working conditions and safety and congeniality towards the women journalists.

There must be concerted efforts from the media organizations, civil society and women journalists and their male counterparts to make the conditions ameliorative for women in journalism and to improve the status of women in journalism.

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