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WOMEN IN MEDIA: THE NEPALESE PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract:

A journalist is a person who involves in activities such as writing/ reporting for newspapers, magazines or on news websites in order to be published/ broadcasted. The journalists have the social responsibility i.e. objective reporting. Media is the "Fourth Estate" and journalists are the watch dogs of the society. In order to carry out the healthy practice of journalism the journalists need to be free and the circumstances need to be safe. Journalist safety is the most important aspect of press freedom.

The other question that arises time and again is about the representation of women in Media. Even the concept of gender inequality might have changed over the course of time and the representation of women is still minimal. Women have not gained parity with men in terms of participation and decision making.

Key Words:

Women, Media, Nepal.

1. Background

“The major threats faced by a woman journalist are discrimination in distribution of salary and the culture of impunity surrounding sexual harassment in media workplaces” (International Federation of Journalists, 2015).

The representation of women at present day Nepali media is minimal however more than they used to be earlier. As Nepali society is a patriarchal society however male domination is not only the issue. The issue of safety of women journalists is also there, the gender pay- gap is still prevalent. Women journalists don't host any of the toughest or serious talk shows. But due to the convergence of new media technologies and influx of private media organizations in the last decade has increased the number of women working in both print and electronic media.

In case of Nepal, journalism is a profession that is struggling day by day. The issue of safety and self-censorship arises within all the journalists beyond the gender. Journalist's safety has been much talked about issue at the present day. Journalists in Nepal suffer from several issues of safety. According to Federation of Nepalese Journalists (2013/14) if journalists give news as per the expectation of protestors (in case of protests done by certain political party) then they behave in a friendly manner or else like an enemy. Journalists aren't safe in their workplace/ home or outside.

There is the issue of physical safety i.e. assault/ threat/ murder/ abuse/ attacks and also the salary issues, lack of/ no training or preparedness, lack of policy formation, the reluctances of media houses and mental/ psychological safety. Within that, the concern of women journalists ever arises. This paper analyzes role of Nepali women in media in every aspect.

May there be the participation of women is less due to various factors what about the concern regarding equal payment? What about women capable of hosting a political show? What about women to be given tough challenge as men journalists? Why are women journalists harassed? Why there aren't women journalist's holding a CEO post in any media house? Why are there no women chief editors? The question with the mark arises all the time.

2. Representation of Women Journalists

The representation of women journalists have increased in the media sector due to the growth of media industry itself. There are over twenty-four television channels, there are more than thousand newspapers registered, and countable numbers of online media. Women are underrepresented at top level i.e. board, executive level, chief financial officer or general manager for that matter. Even in the editorial positions or chief reporters or correspondents,

foreign editorial positions, women's representation is very less in number. Still the women journalists are yet to get the decision making power. The top management is still entirely male dominated; the Press Council of Nepal or Radio Nepal, Gorkhapatra Sansthan or Nepal televisions or National News Council then they all are men.

Now women journalists are also going to the field and gathering news however the newsroom is still biased. Involvement of women is based on entertainment program and lighthearted programs such as Namaste TV show, steps and others. One exception is there now that a program known as Sajha Sawal is hosted by Bidhya Chapagain which deals with the uprising and important issue to the Nepalese citizens regarding air pollution, corruption, LGBT rights. The women are quite in number nowadays, but they are still not given a chance for production and technical departments and also in official boards and formulating policies.

3. The main issues of Women Journalists

Despite of the policies adopted women journalists are facing the salary issues in a media organization. Most organizations do not have policies to combat sexual harassment or proper mechanisms for filing complaints (International Federation of Journalists, 2015). There is discrimination in distribution of salary over a same job done by male/ female journalists. Women journalists aren't given a proper place in decision making level than men. Women journalists also suffer from physical safety, while covering any moment or mob, they get beaten/ attacked by the protestors while they are on duty. Such issues have a strong consequence i.e. they are obliged to leave the job due to social pressure.

It has been noted that the trend of lurking for other jobs has been increasing due to low salary or no salary. Anyhow even being trained/ educated the journalists both male and female suffer from financial safety (Federation of Nepalese Journalists, 2014). However, the cases of violence are less in compared to male but it is discouraging due to the unjust social structure. There's the other thing that comes along when a women is working in the fields i.e. maternity leave. The maternity leave for a women journalist is 45 days only. Women journalists aren't given the chance to work on the tough subjects either that could be politics or economy. As per the research done by (Code for Nepal, 2015) in Setopati.com the representation of women journalists in opinion page is 17.8% only while men is 82.2%. So, women journalists aren't considered to be much of an opinionated person.

4. Analysis of Female Journalists (Safety Perspective)

Male and female journalists are attacked and they go through various forms of harassments from demonstrations while covering Banda/ strikes. Despite of the threats the male journalists anyhow continue with their job but it isn't same with the case of women journalists. The cases of violence i.e. assault/ murder/ abduction are more than female journalists.

Despite of the policies adopted women journalists are facing the salary issues in a media organization. The major threats faced by a woman journalist are discrimination in distribution of salary and the culture of impunity surrounding sexual harassment in media workplaces (International Federation of Journalists, 2015).

The safety situation in case of female journalists is even worst. They are harassed/ threatened but most of the media organizations do not have policies to combat sexual harassment or proper mechanisms for filing complaints where the incident goes unnoticed and perpetrators go unpunished.

Women journalists' are more vulnerable and more prone towards assaults, harassments. Most organizations do not have policies to combat sexual harassment or proper mechanisms for filing complaints. While covering any moment or mob, they get beaten/ attacked by the protestors while they are on duty. There is discrimination in distribution of salary over a same job done by male/ female journalists. Women journalists aren't given a proper place in decision making level. Such issues have a strong consequence i.e. they are obliged to leave the job due to social pressure. Working women journalists' face both the physical and professional safety issues (Ghimire, 2014).

There is feeling of insecurity among women journalists while reporting alone. However the cases of violence are less in compared to male but it is discouraging due to the unjust social structure.

There has been the salary issue which leads the male/female journalists to leave the job and go in search for the other even there is the discrimination in distribution in salary. Whether it is government or private women aren't given chance/ emphasis in decision making. Due to lack of safety trainings the male/female journalists are more prone towards the threats and intimidation (Ghimire, 2014). However there have been various initiatives taken to provide the safety trainings in order to assess the dangerous situations and act accordingly.

Thus, women are more vulnerable in case of safety then male journalists. The tension of physical safety is always there between male and female journalists but not only have that female journalists to go through discrimination in the workplace. It's either in the form of salary distribution or decision making level. Additionally the complaints lodged by the

women journalists go unnoticed or not filed even. And due to the unjust social structure, if any of the issue happens to them they are forced to leave the job.

5. The Changing pattern/ Positive Initiatives

The organizations such as Sancharika Samuha, UNESCO have been doing trainings with women journalists for the quality work and better participation. Sancharika Samuha and Informal Sector Service Centre (INSEC) are such organizations which besides media monitoring and advocacy also engages itself in campaign, awareness building through training, orientation, interaction, issuing press release, and collaborating with other like-minded organizations, monitoring media rights issues regularly and INSEC has also been working in the project for the safety/security issues of journalists across the country (Adhikary, 2014).

Sajha sawal is the best example of the changing pattern. Sajha Sawal, a weekly debate program broadcasted with the initiation of BBC Media Action, started in the year 2007. It deals with the current affairs such as corruption, LGBT issues, citizenship and many more. The presenter of the program in the earliest episodes was a male; Narayan Shrestha. Bidya Chapagain is the presenter now who is known for her calmness and her style of asking difficult questions calmly.

Likewise Ayesha Shakya is doing the multimedia contents in the Nepali Times weekly's online version. Subina Shrestha freelance correspondent and a filmmaker, her works are seen in Aljazeera most often. She was once nominated in International Emmy Awards in 2016 as well. Devaki Bista is another successful photographer/ journalist and a filmmaker. Women journalists are actually have stood out now.

New ICTs have emerged which provide opportunities to share information and resources, and link and network with each other faster. But women's presence in this new communication space still lags far behind (Rana, 2017).

6. Conclusion

Female Journalists are more vulnerable in case of safety than male journalists. The tension of physical safety is always there between male and female journalists but not only have that female journalists to go through discrimination in the workplace. It's either in the form of salary distribution or decision-making level. Additionally the complaints lodged by the women journalists go unnoticed or not filed even. And due to the unjust social structure, if any of the issue happens to them they are forced to leave the job.

However there are fewer examples of female journalists standing out but the presence of women are also absent in any official commissions, boards or committees formed for formulating policies or monitoring the media. The top management is still entirely male dominated, if we talk about Press Council of Nepal or Radio Nepal, Gorkhapatra Sansthan or Nepal television of National News Council then they all are men.

Now women journalists are also going to the field and gathering news however the newsroom is still biased. Lack of proper training also is the other hurdle for the female journalists to rise from east to west in Nepal. Also the organizations such as Sancharika Samuha, INSEC and UNESCO are working for the training purpose and have been providing training for the safety of journalists.

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