



## REVIEW ARTICLE

### VOICES OF WOMEN ON WORKPLACE DISCRIMINATION AND HARASSMENT THE CASE OF ASSAMESE PRINT MEDIA

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#### ABSTRACT

MEDIA is identified as the lifeline to the people on this planet. A platform for the mass, it continues to be the ruler of our existence in the field of communication. This field has unfailingly exposed to us the voices unheard of, the sights unseen and the experiences unfelt. With a wide range of issues concerning media, this area remains as one of the most widely studied and debated picture in the 21<sup>st</sup> century scenario. In the present day, as media voices the need for vehement practice of gender equality, we often tend to overlook about such practices being effective in the media house itself. Does our Indian society, which unfailingly projects its patriarchal reign over its citizens and forms the domain of survival for a majority percentage of the population, overpower the role of media in practicing gender equality? Do women in the 21<sup>st</sup> century continue to be victimized by the claws of an inferior identity in the professional forum which paves the path for addressing this concern? In this paper, the researcher investigates the position of women in media by highlighting the meaning women make of their work and workplace issues in the regional media of Assam. It focuses on the wide variety of domains which speak of the challenges faced by the women journalists in the media houses. This qualitative study seeks to unpack the gender inequality and discrimination in Assamese print media houses. It argues that the patriarchy within the Assamese society extends to media organizations, and recommends that without gender empowerment within the media, its aims and claims to impacting community development will remain hollow.

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#### INTRODUCTION

A society does not know itself and cannot respond to the aspirations of all its members. So who and what appears in the news and how people are portrayed does matter. Which is left out and what is not covered are equally important. The cultural underpinnings of gender inequality and discrimination against women are often reinforced through media across the world. (Behera n.d) The gender bias in media coverage, as mentioned above, is considered to both shape and be shaped by gender inequality and discrimination prevalent in society and its institutions. In fact, United Nations emphasises that for the process of institutional building of gender equality gender mainstreaming is indispensable. The concept of 'gender mainstreaming' was developed by United Nations for the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (UN 2001). It is strategy for making concerns and experiences of

both women and men an integral dimension of all political, economic and societal spheres so that both benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated (Moranjak-Bambura 2006). How far has media succeeded in gender mainstreaming both inside and outside its own spaces, therefore becomes an important area of enquiry.

By demonstrating that media representations promote dominant assumptions about how the world works and as a result where power resides (Sharda 2014), George Gerbner pointed out that in media's role in 'Symbolic Annihilation' (ibid). He further argued that "poor media treatment can contribute to disempowerment" and "symbolic absence in the media can erase groups and individuals from public consciousness" (Sharda 2014: 47). Symbolic annihilation thus became a powerful and widely used metaphor to describe the ways in which media presents and renders women invisible (Sharda 2014). For instance; women are presented for selling commodities, glamour and luxury, but women's struggles and violence on women remains less exposed. In fact, while discussing the status of women journalist in print media

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Pamela Bhagat states that sexual harassment is widely present in this field but not much reported which is one reason for this gross neglect is the prevailing male dominance in media organizations (Bhagat 2004). Monobina Gupta, edit page editor at DNA says (Pande n.d), "Given that there are few women editors in the top positions of power, newsroom culture is invariably masculine. This is borne out by 'male' conversations and sexist jokes heard in the newsroom. Given that the top echelons in these organizations are dominated by men would automatically tend to rule out active intervention by women editors in the choice of news, particularly front page news" If the Shakti Mills case where a young journalist was gang raped while covering a story revealed the vulnerability of women journalists in the society and lack of safety provision in media institutions (Thaver 2014). The case of sexual molestation of a young woman journalist during a high profile media event by the co-editor of Indian news magazine Tehelka reveals the vulnerability of women journalist within media organizations, especially when a man in powerful position is involved (The Hindu 2013). These incidences also reveal that even seemingly 'educated' and "progressive" men view women more as objects of pleasure. The support to accused in such cases from other journalists predominantly men but also women, and their attempt to diminish victim's testimony as fabricated or motivated such as in Tarun Tejpal case are proofs of the unsafe and unsupported environment within media institutions which does nothing but perpetuate the ongoing gender inequality and violence against women in the society (Patel 2013). Indeed, in most incidences it is the accused man who continues to enjoy freedom even, if restricted on bail, while the victim who enjoyed public visibility is forced to live a life of anonymity. During the course of this study the events and information gathered instigated the researcher to explore in understanding the gender based violence in the field media. There have not been many studies conducted on this issue of gender discrimination in media with special reference to regional print media. There is a need to identify woman as a community and delve into building an understanding of gender violence and harassment in the workplace scenario in this broader aspect and not as specific cases in certain specific media houses.

### **Fieldwork, methodology and ethics**

Regional media remains an understudied subject, and within that gender and workplace issues remains largely untouched. Hence, this study sought to obtain rich information directly from the women journalists working in Guwahati city of Assam. The study is based on qualitative fieldwork conducted during July'14- August'14. This study first presents the fieldwork and methodology, and concludes with a discussion on challenges faced including ethical concerns. This study focuses on the lives of women journalists of Assamese newspapers through their experiences and memories of working in the media. Oral histories in such a study are the most effective method for collecting the data as it permits the respondent to present uninterrupted and elaborate information in form of her life story, memories and experiences (Halbmayer 2009) in this case as a woman journalist. Moreover, oral histories facilitate inclusion of most voices (if not all), and not just select few or dominant ones (Halbmayer 2009). The

journalists interviewed are working for seven regional vernacular newspapers of Assam. These oral histories were collected by conducting direct face-to-face interviews of the journalists in their offices. These interviews were unstructured in nature where the researcher used a guide to probe into a setting the researcher is largely unfamiliar with. This allowed the journalists to freely share their stories and experiences about their lives as working women, while also highlighting their challenges as a woman journalist in print media. For this purpose the researcher interviewed ten journalists working for different newspapers in Assam. The researcher also interviewed a senior male journalist from a media house which rarely employs women journalists. In absence of a media database from which women journalists' contacts could be collected, the researcher used snowballing method to generate a contact pool. The contacts of the journalists were received from reliable personal sources which included friends, acquaintances and former teachers. The first step involved connecting to the journalists over the phone. The total numbers of journalists contacted were fifteen. However, the researcher could finally interview only ten of them. The process of taking appointments with journalists was a challenging task. In the second round of calls, some of the journalists who had earlier asked the researcher to contact them at a specific time did not receive the researcher's calls.

Each phone conversation began with the researcher's introduction followed by the research objectives. The researcher also clarified the source from whom their contacts were received. This led to interview appointments with those who agreed to participate in the research. Others expressed their inability to participate due to their hectic work schedule, thus resulting into a small respondent group.

### **The discussion during the oral histories primarily revolved around following themes:**

1. Self-perception about being a women in media
2. Her understanding of other's perception towards her as a working women journalist
3. Work profile such as the position, News beat covered
4. Job satisfaction
5. Choices, compulsions and challenges concerning their work and workplace

A guide was used to facilitate an unstructured yet an organic conversation between the researcher and the journalist. The guide helped in ensuring that discussion includes the core areas intended to cover for the research. The interviews with women journalists gradually unfolded the discriminatory practices of which they were the victims in the field of regional print media. Since the interviews were conducted in their offices as per their convenience, the researcher was aware of the possibility of their responses being curtailed or restricted. This was visible on some occasions where the researcher observed that the journalists were conscious of the environment and cautious in their responses. Since the journalists were uncomfortable in allowing their responses to be recorded, the researcher relied on taking notes manually during the conversation. This made the whole exercise both time consuming and vulnerable to some key information being

ignored or left out by the researcher even though unintentionally. After each interview the researcher reconstructed the conversation based on memory and notes. Furthermore, the researcher belongs to the Assamese community and well versed in the community's culture and language, which proved to be an advantage in rapport building. Yet there were challenges which could not be overcome for instance, the researcher's own diffidence in seeking clarifications or counter questions from journalists. However, this also allowed the researcher to understand when the journalists did not wish to elaborate on certain sensitive topics. The researcher and journalists came from a shared similar cultural context and lived within the frame of Assamese society.

The method of oral histories helped to open up issues which the researcher was initially unfamiliar with for instance, why and how women will present harassment as gender politics within media organizations. During the interview, women respondents hinted at instances of ill-treatment and verbal harassment by their male colleagues, but they were extremely cautious while sharing these details. Their focus was on the attitude of the male journalists, the various ways through which these men become privileged in their workplace, and the practical limitations that made these women accept the situation as unchanging. Given the nature of the inquiry the interviews were often an emotional experience for the researcher. Women sharing on the exclusion and discrimination faced by them within the media houses, produced anger, disgust and helplessness within researcher. To maintain a non-judgemental attitude and empathy towards the respondents was also very challenging given the fact that if on one hand women's acceptance of the situation and lack of resistance was overwhelming, on the other hand the perspectives of men that tend to justify the ongoing exclusion of women was shocking.

## DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

This section draws on the oral histories of journalists to understand their experience of their work and work site. It has been divided into nine categories to allow the readers to delve into and understand the media house scenario in details.

### How 'HE' Looks At Me...

According to the women journalists, men look at women from a perspective where she is characterized as the family caretaker first and then as a career women. They share that men favour women who do not challenge the decisions or 'advices' given by the men. This image is replicated in the media houses where women are accepted to adhere to and abide by the decisions of the men and remain complacent. One of the women journalists states that men do not appreciate and find it difficult to encounter reactive women who might rise up to challenge the male dominated media house which eventually might prove to be threat for the male journalists. According to another, the fear of making the roots shaky is the constant concern of men who avoid vocal and fearless woman. She says that: During my initial days I received negative and rude behaviour from some of my colleagues when I went out of the way to

publish stories which they might not have approved for a woman to do. I had been successful in convincing my head to cover news from conflict zones which my male colleague may never believed I could do. According to women journalists interviewed by the researcher, men believe that women lack the capacity to challenge the position and work of the men in the media houses. Respondents said that men do not wish to perceive women as someone who may bear the ability and courage to compete with men with the purpose of receiving equal status and rights as them in the office. Confirming this view the only male journalist interviewed by the researcher, explained:

See, women are a little delicate and fragile not otherwise but when compared to a man's ability. Reporting on conflict issues or other such serious news event within the city too requires immense mental and physical strength. It requires the capacity to take immense stress and complete dedication. A woman has to balance between a family life and her profession and extreme stressful picture in her work place might disturb her family life function thus creating a menace for her. These statements make it evident that women continue to be viewed as firstly, the family caretaker and then a journalist. Their role in the professional world is inferior when compared to that of any male journalist. The pattern of male journalist's responses within the house was reflection of their means of perceiving women in the real society.

### Power Dynamics within the Media Houses

Female journalists feel that opinions and decisions have an imbalanced position in the media house when viewed from a gendered perspective. They say that every journalist enjoys the liberty to share their suggestions and views on any issue of importance or relevance within or with regard to the media house. According to one of the female journalists, the imbalance rests in the decision making process where the male journalists hold complete power to pass their verdict or decide on any important issue. Another journalist feels that the reason behind this is that the administrative branch of almost all the media houses comprises solely of male journalists. Often in the process it has been observed that a woman journalist's feedbacks are not taken into considerations or given significant importance. As shared by one of the women journalists:

Our feedbacks are definitely heard but not implemented. We are asked for our opinions and views regarding any issue to be discussed before reaching to the head which remains to us. *Baahirot jaboloi napai...taahator burot besi patta diye...* Our suggestions are not given much heed and barely reach to our heads. The views of the men are given more importance.

The experience and being a senior journalist in the media house does not mould the concept of women's ability to take decisions within the house. A woman journalist interviewed shared that:

I do not have any hope of seeing a change in this system. I have been faced with situations where my opinions were specifically jotted down as I was approached as the most experienced journalist in my office. Yet my suggestions were

modified by the higher male members who found my response to be too 'blunt'. There was a need to modify or rather as I would term it 'sugar coat' them which absolutely made no sense. If the fact cannot be produced in its original form then what is the point of working in the media houses...we are not here to simply deliver stories and give a moral at the end. That is not our job. This hierarchy in terms of unequal distribution of power dynamics shows the inequality being practiced in these the newspaper houses. The picture we get to see here is that of the male-female inequality of a patriarchal society which is reflected in the office structure where the ultimate decision maker is the man. What could be observed in these media houses is that women do contribute in the process but their words are plainly ignored. This shows the inadequacy or the failure of a media house in implementing what it projects to the society in terms of male-female equality.

### **Gender based news delegation**

The news beat assigned to journalists in the media house is based on whether it is a male or a female journalist. One of the women journalists discloses that the general pattern followed is such that news concerning politics, economics, disasters which are categorized under the heading of 'important' news is covered by the men. However, on the contrary, women journalists are assigned to cover soft news which includes issues on health, lifestyle and culture. The category of women issues are also placed under soft news by the men of the media houses. Another journalist expresses:

Discrimination is primarily observed on being allowed to cover news only of certain specific categories. Hard news is not very conveniently provided to women for reporting. There are not many instances where a woman goes to the site of a natural disaster or political disturbance... forget about the sports section! So you see whether its elections or floods we are seen as incapable of covering such issues or reporting from these sites. However, you will find maximum reports by us about culture, mythology, cuisine other than women related issues. It is not that we do not enjoy working on these but the point to be noted is that we also desire to work on other issues of concern taking place within the city.

Instead of 'important' beats, the journalists were rather pushed to cover stories on festivals, films and televisions and other such topics revolving around entertainment. A senior journalist interviewed by the researcher said:

I have the right to choose my preferred news beat. However this was definitely impossible in the past. Being a senior journalist now provides me with this privilege which many of the junior journalists in my office do not get to enjoy. This is the picture in every office in this field. I have worked on women related issues alone as well as with another one of my colleagues.

The women journalists shared that it is essential for every newspaper to have a section which would completely concentrate on the soft news. According to them, their bosses feel that a newspaper covering only hard news would make it dull and dry thus gradually draining its number of readership.

Therefore, the necessity of soft news is seen which provides 'light' meaning not so important news to ensure that readers do not lose interest. On this, the male journalist interviewed shared:

A newspaper should have both hard as well as soft news which would maintain a balanced picture in terms of delivering news. A person's life does not revolve only on important issues. They also wish to read light-hearted news which does not need to engage their mind extensively and they feel relaxed as well as entertained while reading it. I feel that women would be the most efficient people for covering them as it does not put too much pressure on them. We know that a woman needs to balance between family and work so assigning them soft news releases them from the pressure at least in her professional world. This displays how a woman is perceived to be predominantly required to fulfil the duties of her family and then her career. It appears that it is difficult for the male journalists to imagine women maintaining a balance between the two by being assigned equal amount of task as the men in their work.

### **Circumstantial understanding of field reporting**

A male journalist's perspective of understanding a woman journalist's position in her family and society is what determines her field reporting site. This categorization exists in terms of restricting a woman and confining her to report on local issues by choosing her field study within the city. The male journalists identify women as someone who primarily focuses on bearing the responsibility of her family first and then her career. They feel that allowing women to engage in an out-station reporting would not be a decent decision as it may 'disturb' her family life. Late night reporting as well as reporting on disasters, accidents or any other hazardous incidents even within the city is not permitted for the women as the male journalists are 'concerned' about their female colleague's safety. One of woman journalists explained:

I have worked here for the one and half years now and I have been allowed to visit an outstation reporting site just once. All throughout I have been restricted to report on issues only within the city. My reporting site has extended to the airport area and nothing beyond that. Last year, during the women's conference I was given the responsibility to report on the event but not on all of the days. I was not allowed to cover the rock show as it was a late night event and my office does not provide any vehicle which I can avail to travel back to my office. My office head and male colleagues say that returning late from Jhalukbari alone is not safe. So my question to them was why am I not be provided any means of transport which can help me return after reporting. I would love to cover on this issue and I see no other reason other than flaws in these technicalities which would prevent me from doing so. Such restrictions imposed on a woman journalist prevent her from being exposed to various circumstances and events. As shared by the women journalists, lack of desire by the men to provide a vehicle for the women journalists who wish to cover stories at any time of the day or night, as per the demand of the time and the event, indicates the male journalists' intention to limit

her capabilities. A young budding journalist interviewed by the researcher expresses that:

Talent should not be compromised if there does not exist any genuine concern behind it. The ability of a journalist to utilize and showcase her talent is being ignored by laying unreasonable statements by them. I fail to understand why a vehicle can't be provided to us or if they are so concerned that why can't a male journalist accompany me to the reporting site. This is pure injustice and I am not ashamed of voicing it out. Let me tell you that this is all over the city across all the newspaper houses. Every woman faces such tantrums by their senior male journalists. Women have shared that the only positive aspect about field reporting is the travel and lodging reimbursement. Both male and female journalists get access to equal amounts in terms of the travelling to the reporting site and in case of out-station reporting the lodging fair, which is only if they are provided with the opportunity to cover an out-station reporting. The only issue is the reimbursements are not received as per the stated time provided by to them but the women share that receiving the money is their primary and only concern. Time is not much of an issue as frequency of out-station reporting is a rare sight for them.

### **Gendered perspective of women issue coverage**

Another female journalist interviewed claims that maintaining a balance and presenting unbiased news on women issues by women is the challenge for every female journalist. Female journalists who speak on behalf of the male journalist in the office share present different perspectives. One of them explains that women present two perspectives of their understanding of covering a woman issue with men. In some cases women feel that working with men in such cases is trying as the work load while covering such an issue together shifts from them to their female colleagues which becomes an additional baggage for them. As shared by another female journalist interviewed during the research:

Men also cover women related issues but the question is how comfortable are they in working on such issues. From what I gathered from my professional experience in the past years, not all men maintain a balanced picture while working on such matters. Either they dominate or show least interest in the whole subject of women he has to work on. I personally have faced problems with one of my male colleagues while reporting for an article in Bongaigaon.

However, the male journalist interviewed presents a different picture. He said:

Our male journalists also cover women issues at times but don't you think it is better for men to cover them rather than the women. It would be very natural for the women to get biased or partial and get her opinions tilted towards the interest of the woman. It will refrain them from providing unbiased neutral news which would be harmful for the image of our newspaper. Men in our office do not find it uncomfortable covering them...also because it is very rare. There are not many stories on women in the city which need to be reported or spoken off.

Whereas some women state that presence of a male journalist shall ensure they maintain of neutral news coverage on women issues for instance, a female journalist shares that:

It is essential for women to be careful while covering women related issues. She has to keep in mind that her thoughts and opinions do not tilt towards the subject matter in a manner that might present her as a biased reporter. While covering an issue on women, I look at it from a completely neutral perspective. These are some of the basic principles of journalism which need to be followed and maintained here. Through these statements it is seen that men build a sense of detachment and lack of desire to connect with the women issues in most cases. Their thoughts, according to women, are built on the lines that a woman is efficient in understanding women issues better than the men.

### **'Measuring' Hard Work**

Women respondents say that the salary of a journalist does not confine only to the position he or she holds in the hierarchical structure in her workplace but also depends on whether he is a male or a female journalist. From the female journalists' interpretation it was understood that the concept of 'equal work equal pay' does not exist in the media houses. This is better understood through one of the female journalist's words when she expressed that:

I work equally hard as the men in my office but earn lesser than them. We both have the same amount of responsibilities and put in equal amount of extra hours, except for when it is really late for me to work.... then why should I be paid less. To be honest, this is the picture in almost all the newspaper houses. Out of all women journalist I know, each one faces the same situation. This is why we continue working with the same media house and do not shift to another. Wherever we go, we know we will confront the same picture. Men and women both require economically balanced life which does not occur in reality on equal levels for each of them due to this difference. Thoughts shared by the women journalists explain that the primary reason for them being paid less is due to the image of women being seen as a 'dependent' person. Men in this society are viewed as the primary breadwinners of the family and bear the responsibility of running the family. Therefore, higher earning amount is a naturally accepted custom for them. The plain thought of a woman earning equal to or higher than a man would raise questions on a man's identity as being inferior than his female colleague which would prove to be a clash in the mindset of men brought up in a patriarchal society.

### **Craze for the Lens...**

When one talks about visibility in the media, the immediate human instinct shifts towards electronic media as the women of the print media say. As told by the female journalists, most of them in this sector are targeted for the job of an anchor or engaged in reporting during festivals, cultural events or any other social events happening within the city which comes under the category of soft news. Print media on the other hand, according to one of the interviewed female journalist, does not

provide the platform for young journalists to experience the tastes of fame, popularity and immediate recognition. This is the background for women to be drawn towards the television media as it opens up various avenues for them to come into the highlight as and when compared to print media. One of the female journalists who has been a part of the print media for the past four years states that:

The percentage of women journalists is higher in electronic media when compared to print media. The primary reason behind this is the higher opportunities in that field compared to ours. It includes Bollywood news, entertainment shows, reality shows and other programmes alongside news hours. Whereas in print media, there is dearth of variety in opportunities for the journalists to be engaged in. The work of the women here is not much recognized when compared to electronic media. They are more drawn towards glamour and television fame which does not exist in print media. It might take years for a woman to be famous or a known name in print media. Young journalists today come from small institutes which have been unable to provide polished candidates in terms of the knowledge and expertise required to be a responsible member of media. There is an absence of 'quality work' which can be contributed by young journalists to enrich the field of print media. One of them shares that:

Most of young graduates come from small and not well-established institutes. There are easily attracted by the polished shiny world of the television. There is a lack of creativity in the minds of these young women today resulting in their inability to provide rich content quality work. This is primarily the reason the job they acquire in that field is not a long-term one. They get replaced by the next batch of new journalists. This is the significant reason behind them switching jobs on a frequent rate. Job security is evident in print media when compared to electronic media. The reason behind is the frequency of employing of new journalists in the electronic media is extremely high in comparison to print media. There is quick succession of replacement of old journalists by the new journalists because of the new young talents coming in to this field which risks their job of becoming short-termed. There lacks a zeal of passion for the profession in the electronic media in most cases when compared to print media. Print media has failed to attract young talents who bear the calibre and ability of contributing vastly to this field and enabling it to improve from its current position.

### **Challenges of a Woman Journalist**

As shared by the women journalists, a woman encounters three major forms of challenges. These include being least exposed to the opportunities one might receive while working in field which does not set any limitations on the women journalists. One of the female journalists interviewed shared that:

We are not permitted to cover issues which might involve visiting and reporting from conflict areas as well as any other site of disturbance which includes bomb blasts or any natural disaster. The reason underlying such actions undertaken is that the 'men' in our office are concerned with the safety of the women journalists. My argument here is when a women takes

up this profession, she is well aware of the challenges she might have to confront here. If the true concern is safety then why can't a male journalist accompany her to the site?

Implementation of such rules clearly restricts our opportunities to exercise our calibre and ability on the field.

The second challenge is the practice of not permitting women to cover news for the newspaper as a result they are assigned with the task of covering soft news especially which also includes women issues under it. One of them stated:

The news pattern to be covered by the women and men differ where women are restricted to cover articles and news on women or other cultural events or other festivals. The paper I work for as you know is a weekly paper. If you go through it you will see that most of the women issues are covered by women and other hard news by men. It is extremely hard to find a story being covered by a woman on the front page of the paper.

### **Another woman journalist claims that**

Discrimination is primarily observed on being allowed to cover news only of certain specific categories. Hard news is not very conveniently provided to women for reporting. There are not many instances where a woman goes to the site of a natural disaster or political disturbance... forget about the sports section! So you see whether its elections or floods we are seen as incapable of covering such issues or reporting from these sites. However, you will find maximum reports by us about culture, mythology, cuisine other than women. It is not that we do not enjoy working on these but the point to be noted is that we also desire to work on other incidents taking place within the city. The third challenge is the discrimination and exclusion faced by women who attempt to challenge the male-dominated biased media structure, which victimizes women to being subjected to mental annoyance in a form of abiding by the protocols laid by their male colleagues in the workplace. A female journalist interviewed shared that she encountered similar situations where she was excluded for following a reactive attitude and not agreeing to what her senior male colleagues had asked her to do. She said:

I wanted to cover a story in a village in upper Assam. However, most of my colleagues and seniors did not support the idea. I went ahead and had a word with my head. After being granted with the permission from him I covered the story which eventually was published in the front page of our newspaper. The irony is on my return, some of my colleagues distanced themselves from me which was a consequence of not abiding by their 'advice'. These challenges when shared by the women disclosed the pressure on the women journalists of their struggle for their survival in this media.

### **Why I Continue To Work Here...**

Women journalists are aware of the patriarchal work set-up in the Assamese print media houses. They say that this picture is linked with the fact there exists a dearth of opportunities for the women to expose their talent and utilize their capacity.

This scenario of women adhering to a compulsive and undesirable reality has led them to submitting to the existent male-dominated media houses. One of the journalist interviewed shares that:

One cannot judge another person's ability until he is provided with the same opportunity as the others. Here they do not give us the space to prove ourselves and yet consider us to be less capable than the men. This kind of attitude coming from senior journalists of the house is unbearable. This shows how they, in a way continue to overlook our importance and contribution in the house. *Maajey maajey bhaabu ki koribo paari kintu hosakei saalei etiya yaatey eku korar nai. Daangore paara nai aamar kotha nu kuney hunibo* (there are times when we keep pondering what can be done but then we realize that our seniors have not been successful in this task then who will pay heed to our demands). Belonging to patriarchal families does not make it difficult for them to believe that such conditions may exist in the work place. One of the female journalists shares how this has existed in the past and why women accept this even though unwillingly:

Even though we despise this trend of being considered inferior than the men we have somewhat got used to it by now. It does invoke anger within us and we want to bring about a change. But the issue is who will do this. All of us know that no matter how much we try it is never going to make any difference. There are women who have tried to work on this in the past but all efforts went in vain. Even though we are helpless we have lost faith in the system and know that till the time we work here we will continue to face such discrimination. Nothing can be done about it.

According to the female journalists since they are accustomed to the male dominated picture of their society in their everyday life, the existing reality did not take them by surprise. They were aware of the fact that any action taken against the media house will rest within it because it will need to pass through the verdict given by male journalist of the media house. These examples and statements made by the journalists reflect their submission to a system and which according to them is not likely to see a modified structure in the near future.

## Conclusion

Does media which promotes gender equality in society has been able to achieve it for itself? This paper attempted to respond to this question by studying women in media, particularly regional media of Assam, and found gender inequality widespread. The paper shows that discrimination in the media houses exist in terms of the gendered delegation of newsbeat, unequal work opportunities, lack of exposure, restricted opportunities for field reporting, lack of women with decision making authority as well as less salary as compared to male journalists. This study shows the prevailing conditions of gender discrimination in Assamese print media which has its underpinnings in patriarchal Assamese society. The journalists – men and women both – are Assamese. Their assumptions, expectations and perceptions about journalism are drawn on the same lines in which gendered norms divide men and women in terms of role, position and power within the society.

Assamese media operate within the framework of Assamese society. Moreover, the oral histories demonstrate that while men continue to act in gender insensitive ways, women journalist too largely remain uncritical of discriminatory practices. They show awareness of gender based delegation of news coverage, but accept men's reasons for the same; they hint at harassment, but portray it as workplace politics. Their wish to see a change in the situation within their organizations while also being reluctant about voicing their concerns openly is resulting from their helplessness and hopelessness in bringing any change in the current exploitative system. Thus, this study shows that symbolic annihilation (Gerbner 1972 cited in Sharda 2014), is visible within media organizations themselves where women journalists remain under-represented and their position vulnerable, showing that power still rests within patriarchal sites.

## Contribution of the study

1. This study contributes to literature on media, gender and labour by examining the concerns of women journalists in media.
2. Within media studies, the regional media continues to be an understudied area therefore by studying issues of women journalists in Assamese print media this paper makes an important contribution.
3. It builds a contemporary account of the Assamese print media from a gender perspective and highlights the prevailing gender inequality, discrimination and harassment.
4. By studying the conditions and concerns of women in media through their oral histories makes a methodological contribution.

## Future research Recommendations

- Since regional media remains under-studies area, more studies should be undertaken to examine the gender issues in regional media of other states.
- This study has been conducted on a small scale and may not have delved on many issues which might come into light if this study is extended and further researched upon.

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