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A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON THE COVERAGE OF WOMEN ISSUES IN MEGHALAYA



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A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON THE COVERAGE OF WOMEN ISSUES IN MEGHALAYA

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ABSTRACT

In media, the discrimination against woman has a different perception. Often, women are showcased in a stereotyped image and there is absence of balanced portrayal of women's contribution to the society. There are very minimalist illustrations of women that could be found in the different columns of the newspapers.

The core purpose of the study is to find out how women related stories or news are represented in two newspapers of Meghalaya and what is the significant of these news reports. The study also employs the coverage of front page news and the editorials which portrayed the woman.

INTRODUCTION

History witnessed how women were held a high position in our society. As the civilization grew, so also the women were removed from the place of prominence to a mere status. Around the globe as well, this discrimination against the women could be seen and woman being the weaker section of the society accepted their secondary status without any oppositions.

According to Simone de Beauvoir in her feminist classic, *'The Second Sex'* states that *'distinction between men and women are more social than natural'*. The social control and the norms of the society had created a kind of convention that if a female tries to act outside its rim, she is considered to be offended. This anguish is however mostly seen in under-developed countries where ignorance, deprivation of basic necessities is hovering.

What describes now is that women are not given the same opportunities which man enjoys, either in the family, society or in work area. Despite the facts that Indian Constitution has given equal rights to all, while female are less likely to continue or work which has high status or good remuneration jobs.

In North East India, particularly Meghalaya are exceptional as the womanhood has a respectable place in the society. This is because of the privilege of having the matrilineal society in the region. Women are given their respectful place with honour and dignity both at home and in society. Therefore, it is understandable that the women have lineage and their children carry that lineage, also have the right to inherit the ancestral property, free access to education, do not require any effort to access into the socio-economic and political activities and power to take decision in the family and in the society. Yet, according to the study of Utpal Kumar De and Bhola Nath Ghosh in '*Status of Women in rural Khasi society of Meghalaya*', patriarchy operates in a subtle way in the Khasi society.

Despite the fact that women in Meghalaya inherited certain privileges in comparison to the rest of India yet, they would never contest for the post of *Rangbah Shnong*(Headman)even though there have been discussion on women's participation in decision making bodies for decades.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

With the initiatives of the women's movement and the process of economic liberalization, there were increase projections of woman in the different media sectors and the discrimination against woman in media has a different perception. The print media is one platform, which is understood as the authentic and credible source of information provided to the people. As the basic role of any newspaper have been to inform, influence, entertain, and foster the development of the nation as a whole.

Yet, there is a very minimalist illustration of women that could be found in the editorial, feature news and front page news. There was hardly any news report that could provide balanced portrayal of women's contribution to the society. Often, women were depict in a stereotyped image, where news concerning women is found under the class of glamour, gossips, sex, crime etc which gives a woman, the position of a low profile status or generalised women in a negative image.

This can be analysis from the study of Chopra (2008), '*Portrayal of women in print media*', that it is estimated by those working in this field that print media, both daily and weekly newspapers, has only 7 to 10 % of the total coverage on women's issues and about half of these are related to sex, prostitution, glamour, entertainment and crime.

While Akhileshwari(1988), had remark the women in media in a dissimilar outlook. The image of the educated women in media is portrayed as arrogant, insensitive, self-centred, and wily or the economically independent woman is shown as domineering, hard, ruthless and the cause of all the suffering around her.

As a result, what is absence in the newspapers is the positive outlook of woman as a successful working woman, an entrepreneur, or good woman politicians. Basically, women have seen in media more as cultural orientation, an artist and dancer or in positive news of successful sportsperson.

METHODOLOGY

The study aims to investigate the type of representation or portrayal of women related stories and issues in the newspapers. The method of research study is the content analysis of the English daily 'The Shillong Times' and Khasi Daily 'Mawphor' over a period of a month, from 1st March 2014 to 31st March 2014. Beside, the study also employs the coverage of woman news in the front page of the newspapers and the editorials which portrayed the woman.

BRIEF INTRODUCTION OF THE NEWSPAPERS

The Shillong Times (The English Daily)

'*The Shillong Times*' was brought out on 10th August 1945, under the editorship of S.B.Chaudhari. The paper slowly gained popularity as it opened avenues especially for Non-Khasi readers to air their opinions and also get feedback on current events. During 1957, the paper changed into a tabloid sized daily newspaper but due to the lack of reporters and also because of other problems, the paper was reverted back to a weekly. The second editor P.N. Chaudhary took over and further improved the paper as per the needs of the readers. Under his management,

the publication celebrated its Silver Jubilee in 1970. After the demise of P.N. Chaudhary, his son Manas Chaudhary, who was already in the field of journalism, took over charge of the publication. The development and improvement of printing technology and the replacing of the letter press with off-set printing was instrumental in enabling the Shillong Times to transform itself into daily paper on 15th August 1991. The Garo edition of the paper was also introduced in November 1993. The publication celebrated its Golden Jubilee on 10th August 1995 which was inaugurated by the then Governor of Meghalaya, Mr. Madhukar Dighe at State Central Library, Shillong. This paper which is still in circulation in the state has the highest circulation among the English newspapers. The publication also has its Bengali edition '*Sangbad Lahari*' which is also running smoothly in the region.

Mawphor (The Khasi Daily)

'*Mawphor*' (The Directional Monolith) appeared on 26th January 1989. The newspaper was brought out by R.M. Marwein and was edited by S.B. Kharsyiemlieh. It is another outstanding publication which was converted into a daily from 1st June 1991 which started off as a weekly and it is presently widely circulated Khasi Newspaper. The succeeding editors were O.L. Marbaniang, G.W. Pohti and R.M. Marwein is the proprietor and also served as acting editor of the publication before D. Siangshai took over the editorship of the paper. It also had an English Daily version; '*Mawphor Today*' which however had closed down in the year 2013. This is because the Registrar of Newspaper (RNI) cannot register two publications under the same name. Therefore on 6th November 2013, it came out with a new name '*Highland Post*' under the editorship of John W. Thabah.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The month of March also has a great implication, as the 8th March also celebrate the International Women's Day. The sample taken for the research is from the 1st March to the 31st March 2014. Therefore, issues and reports relating to the occasion is an obvious topic of discourse analysis. International Women's Day has been traditionally celebrated by Women's Organization and other political forces that aligned themselves quit unambiguously with democratic and progressive forces.(Chaudhuri, 2010).

The United Nations provided broad guidelines to member countries the world over for designing their course of action to bring about gender justice. The First World Conference on Women held in Mexico City in 1975, the International Women's Year identified three key objectives that formed the basis of United Nations work on Women. These were

1. Gender equality and elimination of gender discrimination
2. Integration and participation of women in development and
3. Increased contribution of women to world peace. 1976 – 1985 was declared the United Nations Decade for Women. (HDR, 2008)

The editorial, '*Women's Day: Has anything changed?*' had taken its space in 'The Shillong Times', a day before the event in order to raise a voice for the repetitive danger that drift around the womanhood of Meghalaya. These reprehensible confrontations can be elaborated from the table below.

Categories of news

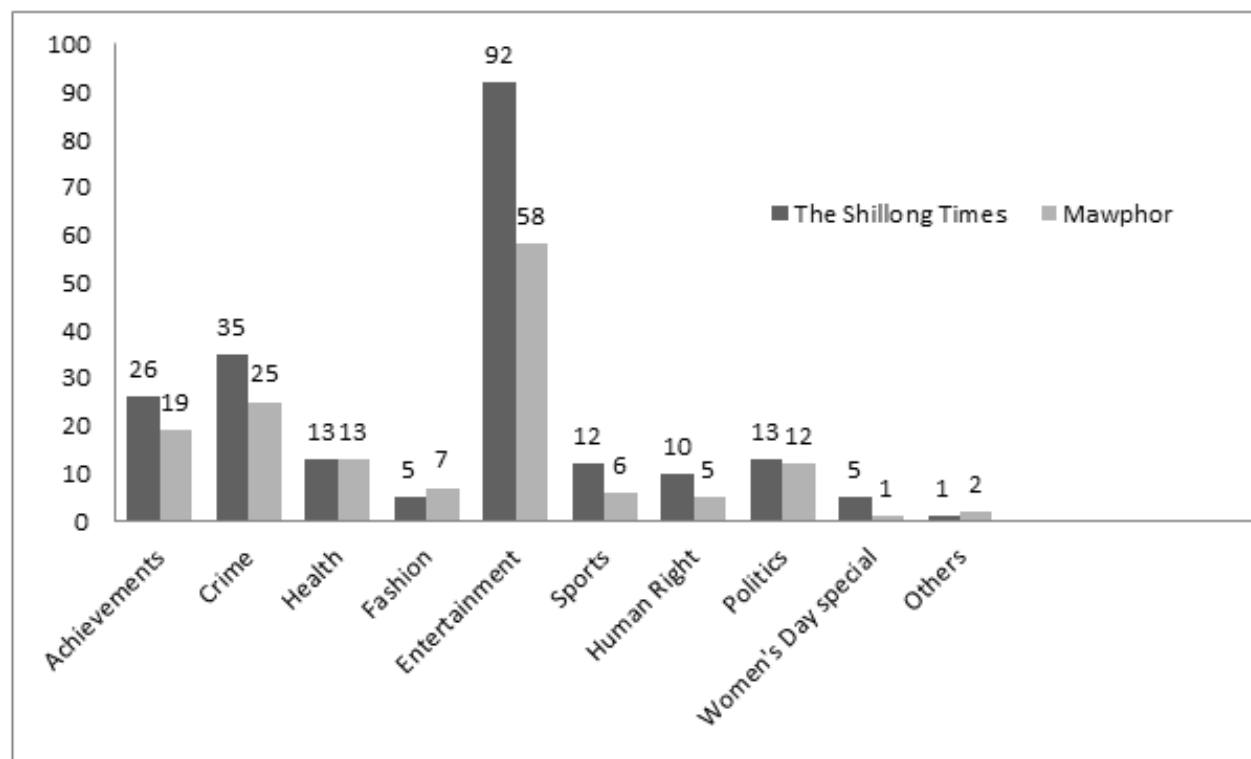


Fig.1. The coverage of categories of women's related news reports in the newspapers.

The 'Crime' is seen to be the second highest that has been reported in both the newspapers. 'The Shillong Times' has 35 news reports more than that of the 'Mawphor' with only 25 news items. The very next day of Women's Day, a report on '*Crimes against women a concern*' had taken in the third page of 'The Shillong Times'. In its report, the most committed crimes of the area are rape cases and about 188 rape cases have been registered in the year 2014. Hence, this is the main reason for 'Crime' to rank the second highest from amongst the ten categories.

The highest rated news item in both the newspapers is found to be the 'Entertainment'. This category has therefore instigated to symbolised women as more of an amusement than to have a serious discussion on the development perspectives or of the successful stories. Here also, 'The Shillong Times' has covered 92 stories on Entertainment in a month while 'Mawphor' has covered only 58 stories. Most of the contents related in this category are either from Bollywood or from Hollywood. Newspapers do not usually address relevant issues for women empowerment but reporting is concerned more with celebrity lifestyle, gossips and their hits and flops.

The third highest rated category is the 'Achievement' from the women who had made their stand in the male dominating society. This category has been given the third preferences in both the newspapers, where women were given high status in relation to the rest of the country. The 'Health' related news is placed fourth and both the newspapers have equal number of news items. In almost all the categories, 'The Shillong Times' has more news report on women related issues, except for the 'Fashion' and 'Others' where 'Mawphor' is levelled more than the other. Overall, 'Mawphor' reports lesser number of stories on women related issues.

Coverage of numbers of days

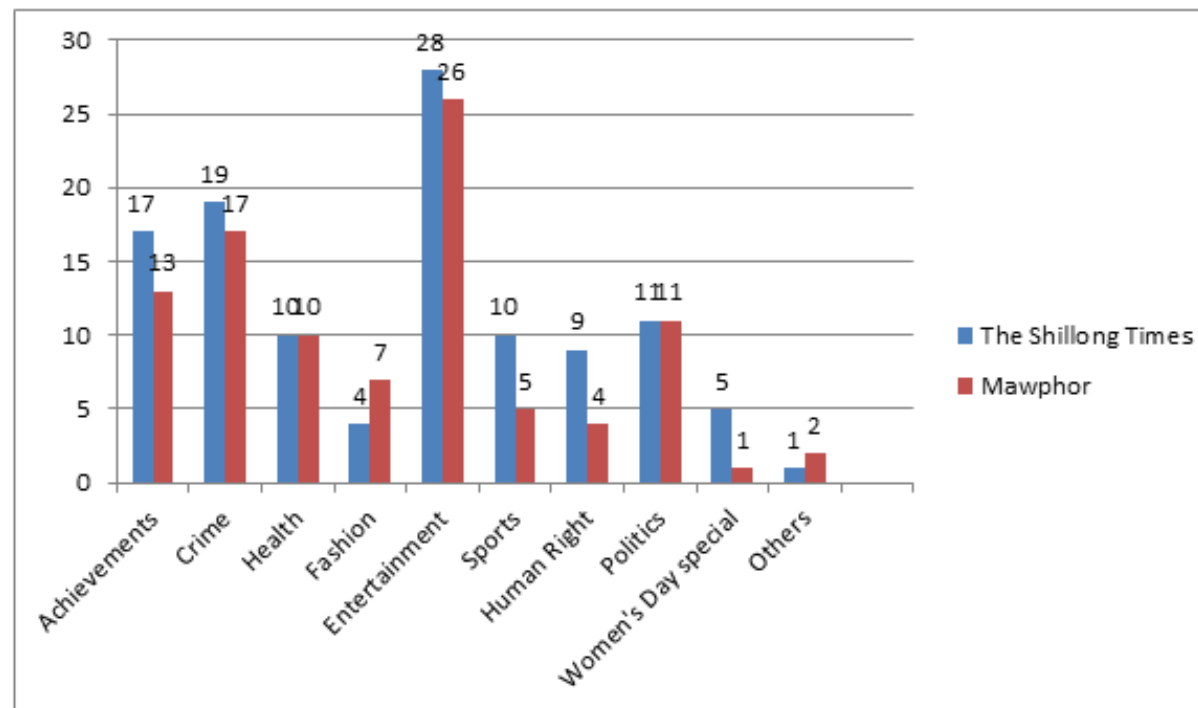


Fig. 2.The coverage of numbers of days, women's related news reported in the newspapers.

In the month of 31 days, the highest number of days (28 days) for 'The Shillong Times' and (26 days) for 'Mawphor' is entitled for the 'Entertainment' category. The second highest number of days is of 'Crime' with 19 and 17 days. The third highest category is the 'Achievement' with 17 days for 'The Shillong Times' and 13 days for

‘Mawphor’. The ‘Politics’ and ‘Health’ are somewhat very close with the equal number of days for both the newspapers.

Front page news reports

Sl. No.	Categories	Number of Stories		Number of Days	
		The Shillong Times	Mawphor	The Shillong Times	Mawphor
1.	Achievements	5	2	5	2
2.	Crime	1	7	1	5
3.	Health	0	0	0	0
4.	Fashion	0	0	0	0
5.	Entertainment	1	0	1	0
6.	Sports	0	0	0	0
7.	Human Right	0	0	0	0
8.	Politics	1	8	1	7
9.	Women’s Day special	2	0	2	1
10.	Others	0	0	0	0

Fig. 3. The coverage of women’s related news reports in the front page of the newspapers.

The news report that has its placement in the front of the newspaper is happen to be the most prominence or has weight in its contents. This is mainly for the reader to get acquainted with the most important news information that is happening. Here, ‘Mawphor’ has the highest number of women related issues that has been published in the front page. The ‘Politics’ has 8 number of news report that highlighted the women concern in 7 regular days. However, ‘The Shillong Times’ published only one news report under the same category. ‘Mawphor’ being the vernacular newspaper of the state, has more proximity to its readers from the region. Therefore, covering the news that has regional political aspirant and the society in which it is constituted is the basis of its reporting. The next important news of the region is the ‘Crime’ which has become a repetitive genre in most of the newspapers in both national and regional newspapers. In this category, ‘Mawphor’ has 7 number of news stories in its front page in 5 days whereas ‘The Shillong Times’ publish only one story in 31 days. The positive side of women’s progress and their

contribution for national development has not been adequately discussed in the print media. The emphasis on stories about women, about their struggle for recognition is only the surface trimming. The actual message to audience still is that society opposes the liberation of women. (Chopra,2008)

The 'Achievement' and 'Women's Day special' have been given more important in the front page of 'The Shillong Times' whereas news stories on the women's plight and politics has been neglected in the front page of its newspaper.

Editorial

Sl. No.	Categories	Number of Stories		Number of Days	
		The Shillong Times	Mawphor	The Shillong Times	Mawphor
1.	Achievements	0	2	0	2
2.	Crime	0	7	0	5
3.	Health	0	0	0	0
4.	Fashion	0	0	0	0
5.	Entertainment	0	0	0	0
6.	Sports	0	0	0	0
7.	Human Right	0	0	0	0
8.	Politics	1	8	1	7
9.	Women's Day Special	2	1	2	1
10.	Others	0	0	0	0

Fig. 4. The coverage of women's related news reports in the editorial of the newspapers.

The editorial page is the moulder of public opinion, which is considered to be the most rational news information that a newspaper can provide. In this section as well, 'Politics' which is one sector where question on women's empowerment could be answered. Thus 'Mawphor' have given 8 editorial columns in its newspaper. The paper had once again laid on the burning issues on women i.e., 'Crime' with 7 editorial, discussing and debating about its

various impacts. 'The Shillong Times' has total of only three editorials that is devoted to women's issues and problems. Two Editorials on 'Women's Day' and one on 'Politics' which therefore accounts the least number of columns provided in the service of women's news items.

CONCLUSION

In Meghalaya, there is a wide variety of publications in different languages which includes Khasi, Jaintia, Garo, English, Hindi, and Bengali which are serving the people of the region with news and information. In publications like '*The Shillong Times*', '*Mawphor*', '*Achik Songbad*', '*Meghalaya Guardian*', '*The Meghalaya Times*' and '*U Jaintia*' and magazines like '*Eastern Panorama*', '*TNT*', '*U Lur Phira*' have a good circulation record in the region.

The literacy rate is also one of the factors that have led to the growth of newspapers and magazines in Meghalaya. As per the Population Census of India 2011, the literacy rate of Meghalaya is 73.8% where 77.2% of this is of males and the female literacy rate is 73.8%.

The present media scenario of Meghalaya is such that the news that is either of entertainment value or news which has sensational in its contents, sells the most.

Women have been portrayed as men would like to see them-beautiful creatures, submissive mothers, efficient house keepers, but nothing else. (Abraham, 1988).

The portrayal of women in the print media is quite degrading more often than not depicting her as commercial commodity. It is necessary that public should be motivated and sensitized to the issue of criminalization, politicization and commercialization of women viz-a-viz their projection in the media in a healthy manner. (IIMC & Press Council of Indian Publication; 1998)

In the present study, the top priority in both the newspapers is on the 'Entertainment', followed by 'Crime' and then 'Achievement'. For a positive and overall development of women, this ranking should have been in other way round.

Both the newspapers has equal number of pages (12 pages), though in 'Mawphor', the news story which highlight the women are very less in comparison to that of English paper. Even in the front page of both the newspapers, there were many important issues and discussion on women based on the categories like 'Human Rights', Health' and 'Sports', that had been neglected in the publications. Justice G.N.Ray in his inaugural speech of National Press Day described how 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 do not usually address relevant issues for women empowerment but reporting is concerned with beauty tips recipes, fashion syndrome.

The English newspaper have wider readership rate, as it read by both Khasis and non Khasis. Yet, in its editorial of 'The Shillong Times', the topic of discussion on important news and information would help the womanhoods to get little elevation was however was absent.

It can be concluded that the positive news reports of women's progress and their contributions to the society is required in both the English and Vernacular newspapers of Meghalaya.

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