

GENDER SENSITISATION AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT : ISSUES AND CHALLENGES



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Women's Rights : Analysis of Newspaper Reports

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Abstract : Reporting on Human Right has become very prominent which also attracted many international organizations around the globe. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights in its article described about all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights and everyone is entitled to all rights and freedoms set forth in this declaration without any discrimination on the basis of race, colour, caste, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion. Nonetheless, women are more or less deprived of their rights within the four walls and sometime outside. Media is crucial to this issue in terms of its coverage and how it is used as a way to help different activities and awareness.

The present study consists of analysis to describe the importance of women's human rights issues covered by the regional newspapers in Meghalaya. The impact of the matrilineal society is the other factor that has integrated for analysing the contents. Does the newspaper conform to the society's value or does it follow the similar perspective of situations of women around the world. The comparative study of two highest circulated newspapers of the region i.e., 'Mawphor', and 'The Shillong Times', has occupied to understand the significant of these news reports.

Key word: Human Right, Matrilineal Society, Media, Regional Newspapers.

I. Introduction:

The world was in a grief situation when the World War II created devastation into the life of the people. Out of the conflict, came the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a noble document that laid out the rights of every individual. The Universal Declaration was adopted by the members of the United Nations in 1948 and in its article described about all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights and everyone is entitled to all rights and freedoms set forth in this declaration without any discrimination on the basis of race, colour, caste, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion.

However, it took many years for the organization to understand the rights of some population groups, such as women, children, indigenous and disabled people. In 1979, United Nations described to establish the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and almost four years later to establish the Convention on the Rights of the

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Child. At the International Conference on Human Rights, which was held in Vienna in 1993, many women's non-governmental organizations and the voices of women activists conveyed that 'Women's rights are human rights'. Then in 1994, the United Nations Conference on Population and Development was held in Cairo. In this conference too, women's rights relating to reproductive health and maternal issues were emphasized. Finally in 1995, the Fourth United Nations Conference on Women was held in Beijing. In the Report of Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995) 'declares to determined to advance the goals of equality, development and peace for all women everywhere in the interest of all humanity, acknowledging the voices of all women everywhere and taking note of the diversity of women and their roles and circumstances, honouring the women who paved the way ...'(United Nations, 1995).

The situation is however not remained on women's favour, as nearly half of the women population are still in anguish for their rights. Globally, about one third of women aged 20 to 24 were child brides. In every 10 minutes, somewhere in the world, an adolescent girl dies as a result of violence. Out of an estimated 35 million people living with HIV, over 2 million are 10 to 19 years old, and 56 per cent of them are girls. (UNICEF, 2015)

Many organizations and activist have emerged to respond for women's human right. They have focused on the issue that concern women's empowerment including the policy change, political participation and advocacy. They are even using the different strategies to reach and communicate the women of every corner of the world about their fundamental rights and to overcome the challenges.

II. Women's Violence Around the World :

a) Child preference

'Being born female is dangerous to your health' (Murray, 2013). Annually 69 million girls are born around the world and sometime life of a girl is denied even before she is born for various reasons. This unbalanced ratio between male and female is seen in countries like India, China, Armenia and recently in Korea. Son preference is not just the issue of third world country. In United States, researchers found that a parent gives more important to a boy, as it also found that parents with an only girl child were 6% more likely to split then with a single boy child.

b) Education

Among 1 billion adults around the world, two-third of women is illiterate. According to the Millennium Development Goals pertaining to education, it describe two main goals i.e., firstly to achieve universal primary education which ensure that all boys and girls complete a full course of primary schooling. Secondly, promote gender equality and empower women by eliminating disparity in primary and secondary education. The UNESCO (2000-07) report reveals that in Africa 54% of women were literate compared with 71% of men. Similarly in South Asia, the women literacy rates were 53% compared with 75% male.

In many countries, if parents had to choose either a boy or a girl for education then poverty persists not to educate girls. The school fees are always the greatest obstacles for girls

in underdeveloped countries. However, with the government initiatives in many countries the introduction of children enrolment has increased the girl's participation in primary level. Mid day meal facilities in schools also helped the poor family to send their children for pursuing education. In India, Kenya and Turkey as well, free primary education and one meal a day has boosted enrolment. The other expenditures like books and uniforms and secondary school fees still forced the poor parents not to send their children in school.

c) Health

Difference in health exists due to the gender inequality between man and woman. This raises the challenge of measuring health status across societies and groups. Women belonging to poorer countries are more vulnerable to many health issues like HIV/AIDS, maternal mortality and FGM (Female genital mutilation) which has adverse effect on health. In Eastern and Southern Africa, women's main risk to contradict HIV is being married. Similarly in a 2004 New York Times article about African brides reported that teenage brides in a number of African nations are becoming infected with AIDS at higher rates, which they acquired from their husband than sexually active unmarried girls.

Every year 350,000 women die around the world because of preventable illness and injury due to childbirth and pregnancy. The main component for women maternity death is poverty and illiteracy, lack of access to family planning, denial of access to appropriate maternal care. The number of girls and women who have been subjected to female genital mutilation is estimated at 13 million worldwide, and annually about 200,000 girls are at risk of experiencing the practice. In India, a small Muslim group identified as the Dawoodi Bohra carry on this practice and is believe that the maiming of the clitoris from the girl is the will of Divinity.

d) Women in conflict

The conflict around the world fought within the borders of countries often fuelled by religious, ethnic, economic and political differences. This involves targeting of civilians, their livelihoods and specifically women. The UN, General Secretary Annan in his report to Security Council acknowledged that "Women and children are disproportionately targeted in contemporary armed conflict; women and girls are vulnerable to all forms of violence, in particular sexual violence and exploitation, including torture, rape, mass rape, forced pregnancy, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution and trafficking..."(Murray, 2013). Many human right activists and feminist organization are trying to fight against the plight of heinous act of rape as a war crime and as weapon of war.

e) Political Power

There are few women who are politically powerful around the world. Women hold only 20% of political leadership, whereas rest goes to men with 80% key elected and appointed position. (World Economic Forum's annual Global Gender Gap Report, 2012). Women were deprived of the political power in many countries. However, some changes are seen in few countries like Turkey where the voting power was not put into practice for women.

0) Economic status

In global scenario, asserts which constitute only 1% belongs to women, while 1 billion women live less than \$ 2 a day. Women earn and bear the responsibility of raising family. Yet, they are still subject to gender inequality which is under different pretext. With the aid of globalization, women's role in work has change from farming to participation in a cash economy. But women's labour is discounted, not valued and even not considered for formal economy.

III. Women's Status in Meghalaya :

Women in India are also not exceptional to these suffering. The society and culture had formed social norms, status and hierarchy which created stereotyped rules and regulations for men and women. Most often, men are entitled to land holdings, inheritance, skills, productive employment etc. Whereas, women receive poor nutrition, poor medical care, and inferior education, suffer violence and is even fall victim to female infanticide. Now, girls are not to be born, because in some society in India dowry system is still prevalent. If a girl is born, parents are susceptible for daughter's dowry.

However, this is not the case in all over the country. As mention above, the society had created sets of norms to follow which had paralysed women to live as an individual. Nonetheless, in Northeast India and particularly in Meghalaya, women life is far more better then the mainland India. Many of these social norms and practices have never heard or seen in the society. Women are honoured with dignity and this is because of the matrilineal society which is been followed in this part of the country. Women inherit the ancestral property and they have lineage and their children carry that lineage. Therefore, through this assertion, it is perceptible that women also take active participation into the different socio-economic activities at home and as well as in the society. It is also presume for the women to get free access to education and participation in political activities. Yet, the finding of Utpal Kumar De and Bhola Nath Ghosh in 'Status of Women in rural Khasi society of Meghalaya' has a little different explanation to this age old customs and tradition. In the study, it is found that now many of the families are actually headed by males. Yet, due to the customary law which is still dominant among the people of the region, the female has economy independence in the family which is the reason for no discrimination among boy and girl. In rural areas, women are mostly illiterate and are not aware of their political power and depend on the male partners for the decision. However, they are free from any kind of limitation which has empowered the women in the matrilineal society. In 'India together', an online electronic newspaper presented a report which highlighted the myth of matriarchal society in Meghalaya. Matrilineal society has been a source of great pride to the state, but experts maintain that the reality on the ground is quite different. The report brought out the dual standards of women condition, domestic violence, lack of awareness regarding their right, reservation in employment sector many such issues which gives a transparent view of this duplicity. (Linda, 2012)

IV. Role of Media for Women's Human Right :

Media can play an important role in protecting the human rights and as well raise voice against the atrocities of those rights. It can make people aware of the different rights and suggest ways to solve their problem and thus empower them to protect their right.

Human rights issues also attracted many international organizations around the different continents of the world discussing under one roof on international political, social, trade, education and health. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights in its article described about all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights and everyone is entitled to all rights and freedoms set forth in this declaration without any discrimination on the basis of race, colour, caste, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion.

Women form half of the population around the world. Nonetheless, women are more or less deprived of their rights within the four walls and sometime outside. The dilemma is the fact that one in five women will experience rape or attempted rape in her lifetime. (Murray, 2013). Media is critical to this issue in terms of its coverage and how it is used as a way to help different activities and awareness. It had represented issues from fashion, achievements, health, social, politics, films, romance and sex. In one of the study on 'A Comparative study: Women's Issues in two leading newspapers of Meghalaya' (month of March 2014) it is found that in one month study, 'The Shillong Times' has only three editorials that is devoted to women's issues and problems. Two editorials on 'Women's Day' and one on political issue which therefore accounts the least number of columns provided for the women. In the other vernacular newspaper, 'Mawphor' has 8 editorials in its contents. It is observed that vernacular newspaper have more stories which were related to the women issues. Secondly, the highest rated news item in both the newspapers was found to be the 'Entertainment'. Next to entertainment comes the 'Crime', which was the second highest that was reported in both the newspapers. In both the newspapers, women's human right stories has very less coverage with only 5 to 10 news coverage in a month, (Sonowal, 2014). In a similar kind of study on 'A paper ceiling: Explaining the persistent underrepresentation of women in printed news', where 13 major newspaper in the US between 1983 and 2008, and in about 2,000 English language newspapers and online news websites between 2004 and 2009 was occupied. The study describe that, the primary reasons women are underrepresented in news articles is that they are underrepresented in key power position in areas such as politics, business, entertainment and sports.

There are many issues around the region, country and the world that the women's right are neglected and they are not highlighted in the media coverage or they are been ignored. To give justification to this injustice and to bring these issues into a public sphere, media need to play its role to empower the women. Therefore, the study is done in order to identify the nature of coverage on women's human rights issues in two different language newspapers of the state. The comparative study of two newspapers of the state, 'The Shillong Times' and 'Mawphor' for the period of a month is done to understand the pattern of news coverage in the region.

a. Newspapers Period of Study

Meghalaya has 80816 numbers of newspapers circulated on a daily basis (source: Audit bureau of circulation). Accordingly, there are about 67 publications (Source: RNI) running in the region which comprise dailies, weeklies, bi-weeklies, monthlies, fortnightlies etc. In this study two newspapers, 'The Shillong Times' (English newspaper) and 'Mawphor' (Khasi newspaper) were taken which has the highest circulation in state. The month of February 2016 is selected to study the contents of the selected newspapers.

b. Methodology

For the study of Women's Human Rights related issues in the newspapers, content analysis is used to investigate the nature of news coverage. The violation of human rights related news regarding women printed in newspapers which also includes the equality, health, education, sexual harassment, violence, police atrocities and crime against women related issues were selected. Besides, other printed material related to the issues as articles, news stories, editorials, letter to editor etc. were also taken for the analysis.

c. Analysis of the Print Area

In the 29 issues under study of both the newspapers, there are 15 pages in 'The Shillong Times' and 17 pages in 'Mawphor' which have occupied the Women's human rights stories and articles.

Newspapers	Average no. of pages	Area of per page (length × width) sq.cm.	Average Print Area of single issue (sq.cm)
'The Shillong Times'	12 pages	47 x 33 = 1551	186.12 sq.cm
'Mawphor'	12 pages	41.5 x 33 = 1369.5	164.34 sq.cm

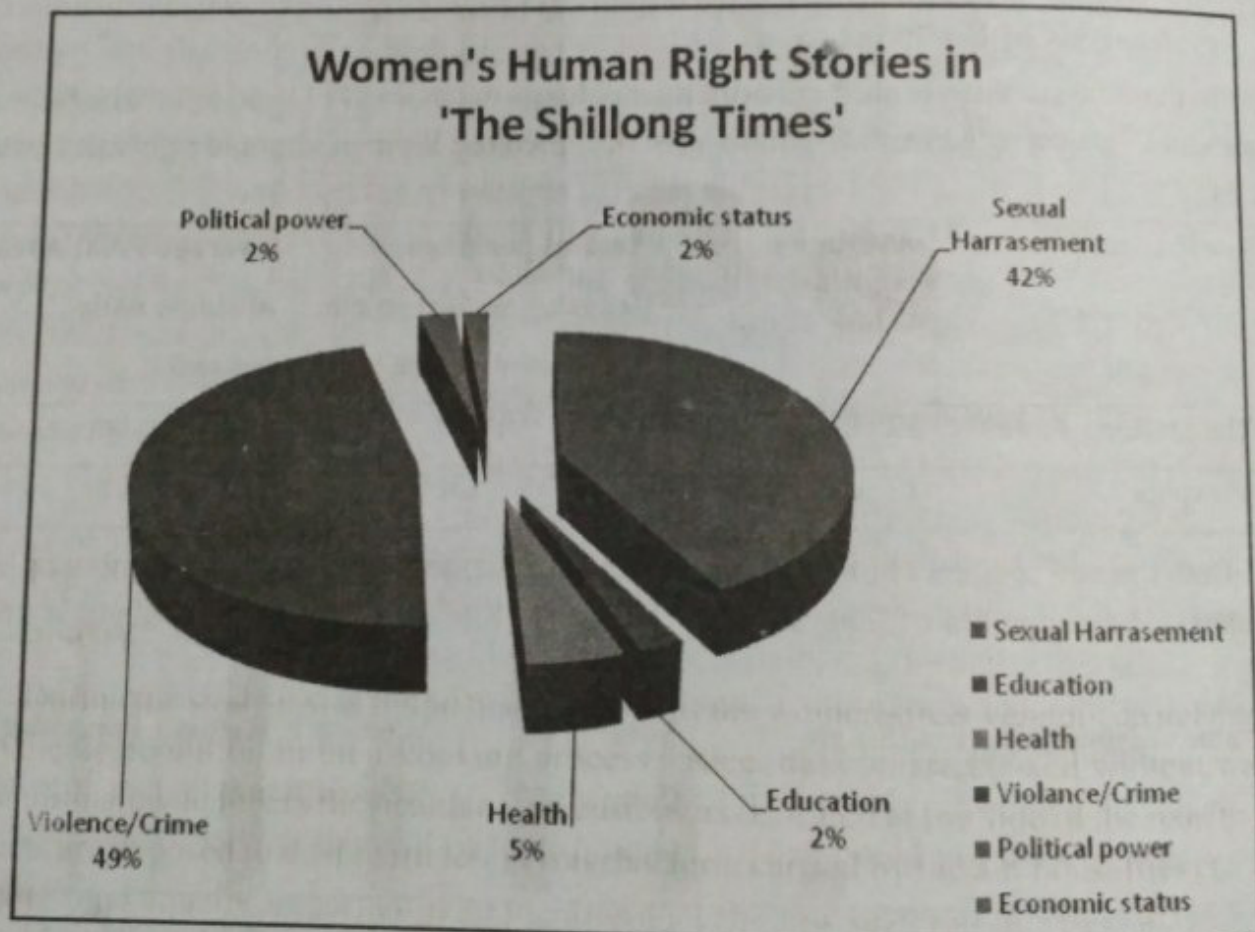
Both the newspapers (The Shillong Times & Mawphor) have the same number of pages (12 pages). The print area of 'The Shillong Times' is 18,612 sq.cm. and 'Mawphor' is 164.34 sq.cm.

Name of Newspapers	Single Issue	Total (Single x 29 days)	Women's Rights Related Issues	Percentage
'The Shillong Times'	186.12	5397.48 sq.cm	1319.00 sq.cm	24%
'Mawphor'	164.34	4765.86 sq.cm	1389.00 sq.cm	29%

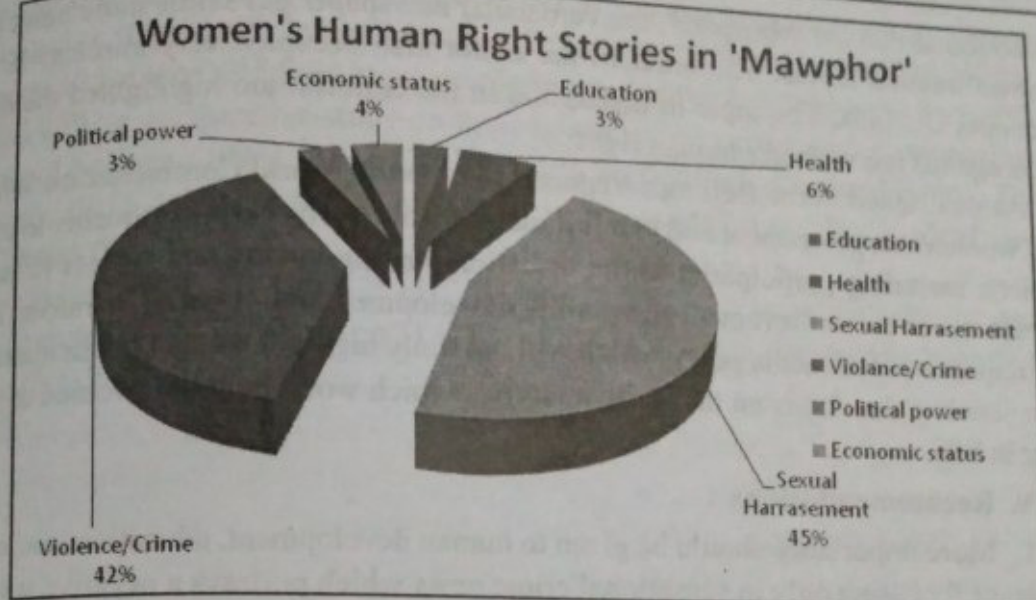
The total number of 29 issues was taken for the study. The women's right related issues cover 1319.00 sq.cm out of 5397.48 sq.cm in 'The Shillong Times' and 1389.00 sq.cm out of 4765.86 sq.cm cover in 'Mawphor'. Therefore, the space covered for women's human right has occupied very less in both the newspapers with only 24% and 29 % respectively. There

was the time when newspaper in Meghalaya was established for either disseminating the Christian believe or to preserve the indigenous traditional customs of the people. While laying emphasis on the recent trend of news reporting in the state, Sumar Singh Sawain, the editor of 'Apphira', said that the 'vernacular newspapers are more concern in the region's news and events, what is happening in certain village, what is happening about development project etc'. Therefore, the women rights and their violence in the region have occupied more in the columns of 'Mawphor' than in 'The Shillong Times' which is the English edition of the state.

Beside, the study also include to analyse women's human right related stories in both the newspapers which are categories into different sections like health, education, political power, economic status, sexual harassment and violence/crime. The analysis of these is explained in the form of a chart with the percentage of each category to understand the nature of news coverage of women's human right in the newspapers.



The above chart reveals that violence/crime is rated highest with 49% in women's human right related issues in 'The Shillong Times'. Similarly, sexual harassment is 42% against the women is the next that rated the most in the paper. Whereas, issues that concern the educational right, political and economic status of a woman which is found to be the least number of coverage in the newspaper.



In 'Mawphor', a similar development of news reporting is also found. The sexual harassment is rated the highest with 45% and violence/crime is with 42%. It is therefore assumed that the women's human rights stories knock the newspaper when it is sensational news like crime, murder, rape etc. 'In Meghalaya crime reporting is prominence after statehood. Because it helps fulfil the desire, ambush the curiosity of the readers. It's an instant satisfaction to the readers' and to the general consumers, it sensationalised. Crimes likes accidents, raping, murder helps in to push the circulation of the paper' - Phillip Marwein, editor of 'Youth Today'.

The other categories of news like education, political power, economic status and health is been rated below 7% in both the newspapers which are the important ingredients for women's overall development.

IV. Conclusion :

Print media in Meghalaya begin with the introduction of first Khasi newspaper known as 'U Nongkit Khubor' (The messenger). During this phase, newspaper gave more emphasis to the cultural orientation stories that preserves the customs and traditions of the people of the state. Later, women's organisation also introduces a newspaper; 'Ka Rympei' (The home). The main motive of the newspaper was to foster the ideal relationship in home and society. Thus, it is assumed that the news that was covered in these papers focused more on empowering the woman in socio - political and economic status.

However, the print media now has changed their focus to the sensational news items. The descriptions of the above analyses brought out the point that the newspapers now pay more attention to the violence and crime of women's related issues more than the other area of their achievements or the development.

The study also shows that both the newspapers, 'The Shillong Times' and 'Mawphor' have given almost equal space to women's human right issue with 24% and 29% respectively.

It is also found that the 'Mawphor', the vernacular newspaper gave little more news coverage to women related issues. The letter to the editor also occupied very minimal in both the newspapers i.e. 14%. The topic of discussion in the editorial too highlighted the crime and atrocity against the women's human right.

As mentioned in the Beijing's Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women that define 'women's empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society, including participation in the decision-making process and access to power, are fundamental for the achievement of equality, development and peace'. Therefore, there is a sturdy requirement of media policy which will not only highlight women related issues in the newspapers but also focus on the positive stories which would help the women to grow and prosper in life.

V. Recommendations :

1. More importance should be given to human development, education, socio-political news rather focussing only in sensational crime news which portrays a negative scenario.
2. Media should play an active role in region to empower and uplift women, scope of new media must be explored.
3. English daily should not cater to urban readership needs; rather act as bridge between rural and urban areas of Meghalaya highlighting the overshadowed women issues.
4. As vernacular newspaper which seems to have close proximity with rural audience must think of better media strategies, to empower and encourage women to claim their rights.

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