

## WOMEN EXPLOITATION RELATED ISSUES COVERAGE BY INDIAN NEWSPAPER: AN ANALYTICAL OVERVIEW

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**Abstract:** Media mirrors society and has become its eyes and voice still not much justice is done to women’s suffering. One of the oldest weapons used for change public opinion is print media reaching people in form of newspaper, magazines, books, articles either daily, weekly, monthly or special issues. Earlier in absence of other form of media, it played important role changing country’s history. The Newspapers collect the information, analyze it, edit and print news reports and articles in the form of news. A large number of them have been called as women issues since ages; no doubt they pertain to women issues but mostly in terms of fashion, beauty, household manage chores, matters related to keeping family happy. They never cover exploitation issues much openly. Henceforth, this paper tried to explore women exploitation related issues coverage by Indian newspapers.

**Keywords:** Newspaper, Atrocity, Crime, Dowry, Gender, Marginal and Women Exploitation.

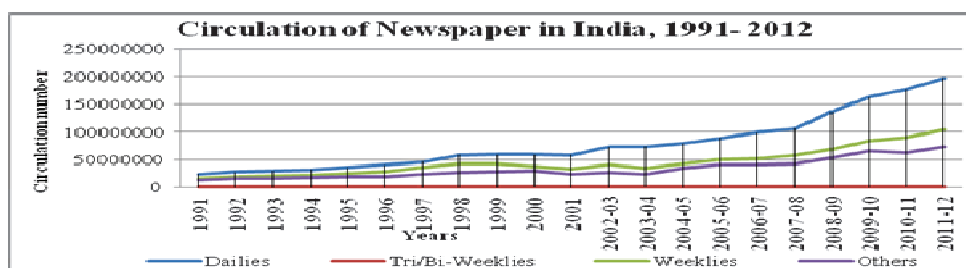
**Introduction:** Given a secondary position women have legitimized as an individual of little consequences. Ideally viewed as Shakti (Power) in Indian society but in reality she faces helplessness, discrimination and exploitation in all spheres of her life: indeed a disgraceful state for a democratic society like our’s. Social set-up determines the social status of women in the society. Phrase of Manusmriti, “Na Stree Swathantryam Arhati” (means woman is undeserving for independence), reflects our attitude towards women in our country [1].

In present era of science and technology, media performs active role in building public opinion, affecting everyday life. Mirroring our society and reflecting its image in various forms. Today society has accepted media as his or her own eyes and voice. Media has the power to create reality which is accepted as such by the audience, [2]. The primary function is dissemination of information that is relevant for social life, but its additional role as an “opinion leader” is also vital in contemporary society. It plays an important role in shaping and changing public opinion and way of life, through reporting and providing interpretation, critique and guidance. Therefore, opinions expressed are a crucial factor in determining the level and direction of social

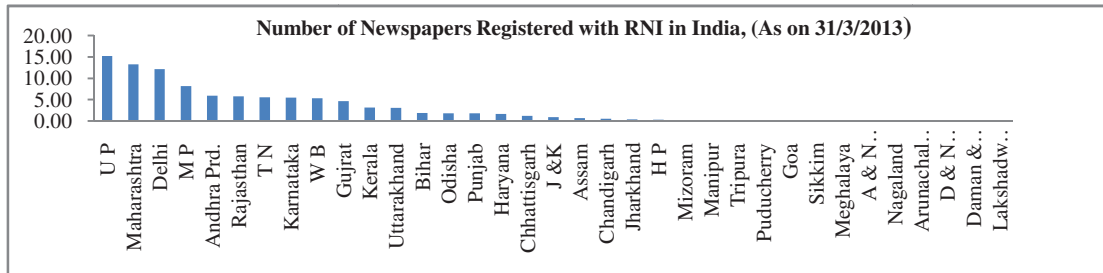
conscious [3]. It has dynamic part in creating awareness regarding female status in society.

Print media is oldest and basic form of mass communication for spreading the information and knowledge to disseminate. It has the advantage of influences readers mind and analyzes process since ages. It is also known in the form of newspaper, magazines and periodicals etc. In Indian history it has played a significant role. Reference 12, pointed out that the existences of only 330 newspaper and 3203 other publications which grew to 110485 publications by March 31, 2013. Among this 94175 were newspapers, 4957 tri and bi weeklies and 11353 periodicals publications at the time of independence [1]

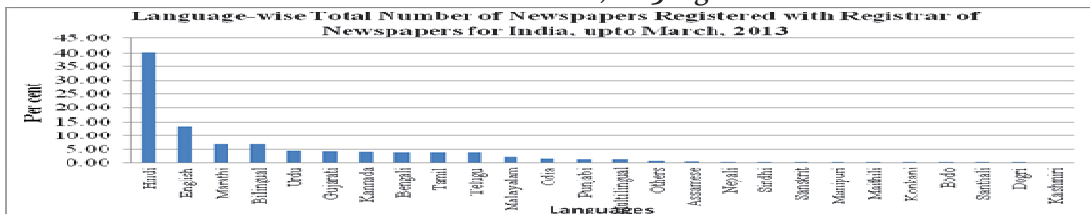
**Newspaper:** It is a medium of developing communication and has ability of appearing to the minds of people, capable of moving their hearts, [5]. A newspaper collects the information, analyze it, edit and print news reports and articles in the form of news. India is the second largest newspaper market of the world, after China, [6]. There are various type of newspapers; national or regional mostly dividing their news in various sections or sub-sections of national- international news, politics, commercial, employment, crime, entertainment, sports, science and technology, horoscopes, weather related etc.



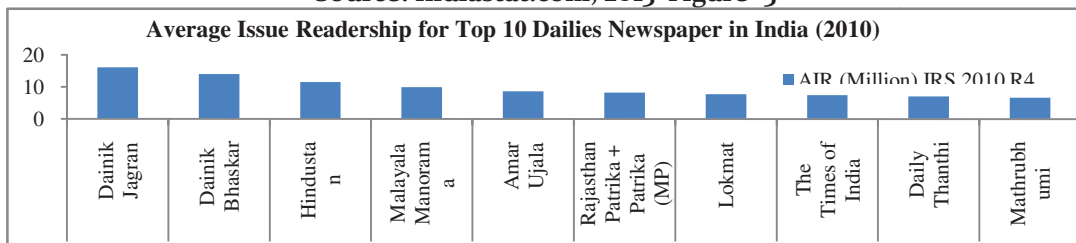
Source: Indiatat.com, 2013 Figure-1



Source: Indiatstat.com, 2013 Figure -2



Source: Indiatstat.com, 2013 Figure -3



Source- PwC Analysis and IRS 2010 Figure -4

**Women Exploitation Related Issues Coverage by Indian Newspapers:** Here in this section we have tried to present the level of coverage of women exploitation by the Indian newspapers. Rationale behind looking at newspapers in detail is that they have a long history in India and have influential effects on public opinion. The presentation has been divided into two sub-sections covering the coverage issues before and after independences separately.

**Before independence:** At the end of 19th century, various social activists tried to protest bringing essential changes in Indian society. They attacked “Sati”[2] Pratha and encourage widow marriage. According to Reference 12, some English newspaper started were “The Times of India (1861), The Pioneer in (1866), The Amrita Bazar Patrika (1868), The Statesman (1875), The Hindu (1878) and The Tribune (1880) and The Hindustan Times (1923). The Amrita Bazar Patrika was a bilingual publication. Apart from English it was published in Bengali language also [12]. They pointed out that, some other regional languages newspapers like Malayala Manorama, Mumbai Samachar, Deepika also laid their founding stone during this period. In the early twenty century “Young India” a weekly newspaper started in 1918 by Mahatma Gandhi. Along with that he also stated “Navjeevan” in gujarati and “Harijan” under the editorship of Mahadev Desai. They mostly covered

freedom struggle during this period.

**After independence:** It was not before 1975; the declaration of an internal emergency banning almost every right of press but agreed to increased awareness about women faced cruelty and need for their liberty at national level. This emergency witnessed nationwide campaigns by women’s group who joined to demand changes in law and dowry related issues and other female related issues. These events were largely covered especially in English newspaper press but during that time it had lesser reader than the regional languages newspaper readers [8].

Social issues related to sex or gender were covered diminutively and negligible amount of women issues published on front page, editorial page and edit-opposite page 1.09, 1.9 and 2.3 per cent respectively; showing the weightage given by newspapers to the issues related to women exploitation. About 69% of them focused on crime and violence against women mostly extra ordinary in nature. Numerous issues related to human rights and women position in society was published during this period. Sati Pratha and Muslim personal law received a lot off press coverage becoming main causes of women’s movement; adding to women journalist and new values of the issues involved [2].

In eighties women’s movement gathered strength and emerged powerful especially in gender related issues

covering sati and dowry. Presses covering such issues were in news at that time. Coverage of these events was considered extraordinary. The news related to Roop Kanwar performing 'Sati' received an average of 11 per cent of the total news coverage for about four weeks. In one aspect all these were greeted and commendable; on the other hand there emerged different issues that took ten days for press to realize. A Rajput widow performing Sati demonstrates her strength and it made her a Rajput in traditional sense. Neither of the newspapers went deep inside the matter to treat it as a women issue [2]. Similarly with few surface facts the Meher issues related to Shah Bano was not covered by any of the newspapers seriously and fully. Consequently media lost a great opportunity to launch a debate on the status of women of all religions outside the institution of marriage. Times of India attempted to picture her demand for meher badly. The Indian Express even tried to communalize the event by advertising Vishwa Hindu Parishad's advertisement placing it on top of the page, opposite to edit page calling Hinduism to have greatest respect for womanhood and God resides where women are worshipped. There is no doubt that advertisement is a source of revenue for the media but advertising such insulting, rude and mutually offensive advertisements was a wrong decision on the path of this newspaper [2].

Dowry death issues came to media's attention in early 1979 and periodically remain in news up to 1984, as the parliament of India passed amendments regarding this issue. Similarly amendments were made on the issues related to Sati case of Roop Kanwar. Coverage of four out of five issues related to dowry deaths, rape, sex determination tests and sati was partly the result of women's movement but the fifth issue, of Shah Bano controversy, gained national focus mainly due to its religious and political aspect. However, an important issue of a woman's demand for maintenance after divorce was foreseen by everyone [8].

**Coverage from 1980-2000:** Scenario changed, with time there emerged new types of crimes such as drugs, terrorism, child abuse, rape, mugging and policy matters over the period. Crime has become a biggest and most competitive area in journalism [9]. Certain crimes received unequal newspaper coverage. There was no match between the news covered and the actual crime committed against women. News coverage resulted in faulty public opinion [10]. Not adequate representation of women was done by newspapers leaving behind the cultural biases [11]. Today women are the marginal sections of Indian population. Opinions of dominant sections of society are given more weightage and, coverage results in unquestioned recognition of such definitions which

affects the coverage of women and their concerns directly. Women's oppressions are so commonly placed and widely accepted that they are not judged enough to value coverage not fitting into the traditional concepts of what constitutes news. This is reflected in the kind of issues which receive attention. Campaign against the practices of sex determination and female feticide received some coverage but did not reveal the violence involved in it. Issues related to her work, health, status in society and family experiences – day to day lives, deprivation and tyranny they were routinely subjected far less coverage. Newspaper coverage of eighties clearly reveals the attention received by dowry deaths, rape and sati for which some of the most active, vocal and visible campaigns by women's groups were carried on during that time [8]. The era when women started stepped out of their threshold becoming economic independent; entering new occupations but still did not reach some of the most challenging ones such as journalism desk. It is evident from the history of regional presses, where the entry of women into this field was much sluggish. Few scholars called it to be basic reason for less coverage of news related to women exploitation. Even renowned newspapers in India do not talk about sexism, racism and pornography like the western countries newspaper did by then [8]. Exploitation against women was never a news gathering issue rather presenting women as consumers for target audience by advertising them. Newspaper reports do not represent full coverage of sexual violence and dealt only with few selected cases [3].

**Coverage from 2001 to till now:** Fewer attempts were made to integrate women perspectives into news coverage or editorial comments rather emphasis was on sensationalizing them, even though it is believed that newspaper cover of such issues than television. Despite all these, the fact remains that like its electronic counterpart it also makes little meaningful intervention on behalf of women. Emphasis on hard news, sensationalism, and absence of women angle on many issues, and patriarchal value premises were rarely touched. Most important, there is hardly any difference between the national and regional press in this regard. Still gender perspective remains disintegrated as news gathering process and even not covered in editorial till 2005. Empirical studies point out newspaper's biasness. Account for 5.01 per cent of the total news items in all the four dailies taken together [2]. The statistics demonstrates that newspaper does not show fair image of women's different lives; giving huge space to stylish image of females like actresses, models, cinema and rich women life and their hobbies [4]. Cases related to sexual harassments and rapes are published more

than any other relevant issues like equality, health, education, crime and police atrocities [12]. Hindi newspapers cover's women issues more analytically in editorial, column and article. It also stated that daily episodes associated to females are used to cover by newspapers but female's exploitation news could not get place in it. Newspapers cover women problems in limited way which need immediate attention of policymakers for required issues like unfavorable sex ratio, infant and maternal mortality, crime against women and the effects of poverty on women and their families [4]. Reference 11, said that high share of males expressed that they do not expose the female's successive story along with news on women's violence. But they write according to the demands of the society, moreover they have to sell the newspaper for some sensational news. The brutal story of 23

years girl being raped and then her died was highlighted by all the newspaper due to people protest across the nation. It proved to be turning point and since then a large number of such issues have been covered but this has surpassed other form of women exploitation issues.

**Conclusion:** Up till recent newspaper had a powerful hold over public opinion market. It suffered a little with rise in awareness and use of internet among young as well as elderly generation. It has targeted literate people until now. Newspaper should rise to consensuses and cover sensitive issues without socio-cultural or political biasness. The Hindi and Regional language newspapers have a good amount of common mass as their reader so should be encouraged covering women exploitation issues at the ground level.

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