

Gender Sensitivity in Journalism Education: The Case of University Education in Kerala

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Abstract

The concept of gender sensitivity has been developed as a way to reduce barriers to personal and professional development created and sustained by sexism. Gender sensitivity helps generate respect for individuals regardless of their sex. As education is the best way to change the attitude among the people on different social issues. Gender sensitive pedagogy in the curriculum is the finest way to develop the sense of gender equality. Gender sensitive education helps pupils determine which assumptions in matters of gender are valid and which are stereotyped generalizations. It opens up the widest possible range of life options for all genders. This study is an attempt to analyze how this approach has been reflected in mass communication education in Kerala. We take the syllabi of PG level media programmes in the universities in Kerala as a case point to find out to what extent mass communication education in the region is accommodative to gender questions and concerns. After a qualitative thematic analysis of the syllabi the authors argue that the proper utilization of gender education will help eradicate the existing gender inequality and gender stereotyping both in education and professional practices, but university level media education syllabi practically fails to cater to this approach.

Keywords: Gender Sensitive, Journalism Education, Mass Communication

Introduction

How do gender gap and gender inequality impact the media and its content; and from where can we start to eradicate the problem? This research tries to trace the issues involved in gender mainstreaming in journalism education. Gender inequality refers to unequal treatment or perceptions of individuals based on their gender (UNESCO). It arises from differences in socially constructed gender roles. Gender systems are often dichotomous and hierarchical, and gender binary systems may reflect the inequalities that manifest in numerous dimensions of daily life. Discrimination based on gender is a common civil rights violation that takes many forms including sexual harassment, pregnancy discrimination, unequal pay for women who do the same job as men, and discrimination in employment and education

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(Kalakoti, 2018). To overcome gender inequality we need to have gender sensitive society, which can only be changed through education.

Gender sensitivity is the systematic consideration of differences between conditions, situations and needs of women and men in all policies and actions. The concept of gender mainstreaming was introduced in the 1990s as a key policy strategy to achieve gender equality. The Women's Conference in Beijing, 1995, endorsed the strategy of mainstreaming a gender perspective into all public policies in order to counter gender bias in society and policies and to produce gender-equal policies (United Nations, 1997). Nowadays the inclusion of gender sensitivity in curriculum is a main agenda because gender mainstreaming promises to bring about change and transform the status quo and to eradicate the unequal representation and stereotyping of women through education. This study focuses on gender mainstreaming aspects of journalism curriculum in four universities of Kerala, south India.

Kareithi (2014) observed that in the digital era the hegemonic masculinity in media has increased because of curricula without gender sensitivity. The researcher also found that new technologies had allowed greater freedom for the media to create highly seductive images that transfix audience attention while avoiding critical interrogation. Social media and other internet-based technologies have increased the media's powers of replication, amplification and extension of stereotypes of masculinity across the globe. And as media consolidation shapes the uniformity of tastes, it is becoming increasingly clear that some of the erstwhile local models of hegemonic masculinity in specific regions of the world have achieved ascendancy on a global scale. As a solution the researcher suggests the revision of curriculum addressing the problems of women and exploring the ways in which the stereotypical images affect the dignity of women.

The study "Violence against Women Journalists" (Srebeny, 2014) observes that the main source of the violence is the one faced within the firm and from co workers. In a male-dominated profession in some of the most violent, unstable and patriarchal societies, the dangers to women journalists might always be present. And as a solution, the researcher suggested that the working atmosphere and academic sections of journalism profession should undergo gender mainstreaming.

The study, "Women in Decision Making Structures in Media" also pointed out the problem of stereotyped content. The study conducted by (Ross, 2014) found how senior women experience their media workplace and what kinds of gender-equality and/or women-focused policies are in place in those

organizations. In conclusion, the researcher suggests the implementation of gender neutral newsroom. Newsroom workers and professionals were treated as 'sex neutral' while 'gender' had yet to emerge in media studies – or in any other discipline for that matter – as a useful concept. Another study by (Sarikakis, 2014) points out that the lack of gender mainstreaming policy in the media is the outcome of regulatory bodies and the state, historically based on patriarchal cultures, the dominance of profit-oriented media systems over public service media and media with public service remit and ingrained cultural beliefs of gender superiority/inferiority. The researcher recommends that gender mainstreaming should, depending on the context, both be a policy and a strategy for improving women and girls' position in society.

The studies so far categorically propose gender mainstreamed education as one of the potential solutions for the overpowering masculinity in media operations and consequent inequality faced by women professionals in the field. Gender sensitive media education is supposed to inculcate the gender neutral perspectives and multiculturalism in media profession. Academic initiatives towards this direction are already started in developed countries taking cues from the strategies and policies developed and propagated by international agencies like UNESCO. But, despite countless efforts, in developing nations like India, gender mainstreaming is yet to be introduced in media education. The present study focuses on the gender mainstreaming aspects of post graduate level journalism education curricula followed by four major state funded universities in Kerala, a state in south India, which is known for total literacy for both men and women and high development indices despite its low social infrastructure. The universities selected are Kerala University, Calicut University, Malayalam University and Kannur University. The general objective of the study is to find out how gender sensitive factors are incorporated in the syllabi of university level journalism education in Kerala. To materialize this the researchers conducted a thematic analysis of journalism syllabi followed in the select universities in Kerala in respect of the themes: women related media laws, feminist media theories, women in media history, gender sensitive reporting, sexism in language, development communication and women empowerment.

Methodology

Being an explorative study the authors do not propose any hypothesis, rather a qualitative content analysis of the syllabi of the universities in Kerala was carried out to arrive at conclusions. Content analysis is a method of studying and analyzing communication texts in a systematic, objective, and quantitative manner for the purpose of measuring variables (Kerlinger,

2000). In this qualitative content analysis the corpus selected for the study is undergone subjective evaluation based on the themes the researchers identified as appropriate to the objectives of the study.

The Corpus under Analysis

The corpus under the analysis of the study was the syllabi of post graduate journalism programmes of the select universities in Kerala. A detailed account of the syllabi taken for the analysis is given below:

Universities	Syllabus	Effective from
Calicut University	Master programme in mass communication and Journalism	2014 (Admission)
Kerala University	Journalism Mass Communication and video Production	2014 (Admission)
Kannur University	Mass Communication and Journalism	2015 (Admission)
Malayalam University	MA Journalism and Mass Communication	2013 (Admission)
MG University	MA Journalism and Mass Communication	2014(Admission)

Unit of Analysis

The basic unit identified for analysis is the syllabus of each course under the programme of the university. Being an interdisciplinary subject that is framed as a potpourri of a wide-ranging domains in communication from multiple angles such as history, law, culture, sociology, technology and more, it was essential to fragment the entire syllabus into course based analysis considering the appropriate themes identified for the study.

Themes identified

- Women related Media Laws

Women related media laws mainly discuss the laws like related to indecent representation of women, sexual harassment, media freedom, under representation of women in media, freedom of information, online abuse, working women journalist organizations etc.

- Feminist Media Theories

Feminist media theory relies on feminist approaches to media practices and the political economy it afforded. That is, it applies philosophies, concepts, and logics articulating feminist principles and concepts to media processes such as hiring, production, and distribution; to patterns of representation in news and entertainment across platforms; and to reception. Unlike approaches that hide their politics, feminist theorizing is explicitly political. It addresses power (Krijnen, 2015)

- Sexism in Language

For the absence of multicultural approach and sensitivity as well as the lack of respect for individuals, the form and content of mass media are very vulnerable to sexism primarily effecting female and trans genders. It has been linked to stereotypes and gender roles, and leads to create ideas like one sex or gender is essentially superior to another. Extreme sexism may foster sexual harassment, rape, and other forms of sexual violence.

- Gender sensitive reporting

The gender sensitive reporting means taking a gender natural approach when reporting news. The components of gender sensitive reporting are equal representation, avoiding gender stereotyping and following gender balance.

- Media and women empowerment

The topic mainly focuses on how development communication and women empowerment are interrelated. And how development communication helps to developed women community to self-sufficiency.

- Women in media history

In history of mass media across the global women played a crucial role though the subject still remains his own story. In this respect, it is vital to enquire how women contribution to the origin and growth of mass media in different social contexts is reflected in media curriculum.

Analysis

Content analysis of the syllabi was done to explore how mass communication and journalism students are prepared for gender-neutral media practices. Such an approach will help to increase the coverage of gender issues in the media and to change the attitude towards the women journalists. This content analysis focused on the factors related to gender in the syllabus of five universities.

While conducting this theme based analysis, it is found that the universities in Kerala traditionally follow almost the same pattern of curricula and syllabi for their post graduate media education, perhaps following the UGC model curriculum or UNESCO recommendations for media education. Hence, the pattern of coverage of the themes identified for the analysis was found to be spread over the course syllabi identically with minor variations. However, it was found that when some universities totally skip some areas the others give some importance to them. This variation is due to the perspectives of those who worked behind framing curricula and syllabi, rather than a concerted effort or a common policy derived out of any affirmative action from the academia.

A common trend seen in the syllabi is that most of the universities teach media laws with significant focus on women related media laws in the country, of which the prime one is an act related to the indecent representation of women. Though the Indecent Representation of Women Act is for common purpose, the practical application of the same is closely related to media operations including portrayal of women in advertisements. When Calicut, MG, Kerala and Kannur universities have included this law as a subject of study in their syllabi of the course Media Laws, Malayalam University, the latest entrant into media education with focus on Malayalam language is found to miss any reference to media laws related to women. However, in its fourth semester, portrayal of women in media found a place with proper significance.

The second theme subjected for analysis was feminist media theory. The theory was originated in the context of an entire wave of feminist academic media research that had the goal of providing evidence that would support the criticism of the women's movement, has started in USA in the early time of feminism waves. Feminist media theory activists' focus on the representation of women in terms of numbers and stereotypes, certain approaches to pornography, offensive terminology and hate speech as well as demands for 'more realistic' representations of women. This criticism is also founded in quite different starting assumptions and understandings of media representations, meaning, and group identities (Krijnen, 2015).

None of the universities in Kerala, except for the University of Calicut, included this very prominent theory that revolutionized the academic analysis of media practices fundamentally incorporating feminist approaches. The syllabus of the course Film Studies offered by the University of Calicut has included this theory among many perspectives to study media, particularly films. Also, the syllabus of the course Themes, Theories and Issues in Mass Communication taught in the second semester at the University of Calicut has a component titled ‘ Media and Gender’ which facilitates a theoretical framework for media analysis.

Form and content of media, particularly media language, are most often found to be sexist, perhaps due to the influence of general trend among the public in using sexist language in their everyday life. Most of the journalists, particularly local reporters and those in the less prominent and unprofessional media follow the traditional nuances of language without considering the sexist elements in place. Putting an end to this traditional practice is to be stemmed up from the academia with proper language policy. Sensitization into this aspect of language use is not found to have any place in the media syllabi of the universities in Kerala, except for the syllabus of the course titled ‘Creative Writing’ followed in the University of Calicut for its second semester where sexism in language is included under the topic ‘sexist and disorder language’.

Gender sensitive reporting is not seen included as such in the syllabi of any universities in Kerala for their PG level media education. However, the components like stereotyping, gender and media, multicultural writing and sexist language are found to have a place in syllabus. It can be deduced from this presence of the components that construct the concept of gender sensitive reporting that all these scattered elements will contribute to making the students sensitized into gender balanced media operations, particularly reporting news. University of Calicut included these themes in their second semester course: Themes, Theories and Issues in Communication, with a view that they are to be considered as a prevalent issue in media landscape and to be analyzed from theoretical framework. However, these components are totally absent in the syllabus of practical oriented course in the first semester ‘News Reporting’. However, the syllabi of Malayalam University, included gender sensitive reporting directly as a component of their reporting course. Kerala University syllabus addresses this issue incorporating Gender and Media, Gender and Equality in their syllabi.

Media and Women Empowerment is the yet another theme subjected to analysis. All the universities in Kerala included this theme in their subject either in the course titled Development Communication or in

Communication Theory. The syllabus of Kannur University has direct mentioning of gender and development and *Kudumbasree* in the course related to Development Communication.

Kerala University, Vocational subjects like Development Communication and media society cover two topics related to gender issues like gender equality and gender and media in the areas like theory, broadcast, reporting, photojournalism, advertising are covered without discussing the element of gender and gender issues.

Women in media history are totally absent in media syllabi in the universities in Kerala. Women have contributed a lot to the development of mass media across the world, and India and Kerala social contexts are not exceptions. Even textbooks have no significant references about women journalists, entrepreneurs and managers. This absence of historical contributions of women is not an accidental one; rather it's a normalized pattern in writing history, particularly in patriarchal societies like India. This significant absence is equally felt in the history of all subject areas including science, technology and social sciences, that too at all levels of education

Conclusion

All the universities in Kerala follow almost same pattern in their syllabi for PG level journalism education, with minor exceptions. However, the significance given to women issues and gender sensitivity particularly related to the themes identified above in varying degrees. From this it can be deduced that it is the approach of the syllabus developers, not any common policy that determined the extent of gender sensitivity found in journalism syllabus in Kerala and this situation warrants deliberate and collective attempts to sensitize education administrators and faculty who mainly prepare the syllabus of the programme to gender equality and related concepts also a common policy in this regard is to be formed with government imitative

Among the themes analysed, media and women empowerment is the only area directly or indirectly covered by all the media syllabi at the universities in Kerala. Opposite to it, the theme women in media history are totally absent from the syllabi of all the universities.

While the University of Calicut covers feminist media theory, sexist language and media laws related to women other universities skip these themes from their syllabi. Malayalam university syllabus covers women magazines, gender sensitive reporting and women and media in their syllabi.

In the syllabi of MG, Kerala and Kannur universities, the reference to women issues and related themes are less compared to other two universities.

From the analysis it was found that though the pattern of curricula and syllabi followed by the universities in Kerala for their PG level media education is identically, their approach to gender sensitive curricula and syllabi lacks proper policy and direction. This is not the case of media curriculum alone, but the same would be the case in almost all domains since there is no proper education policy that aims at gender mainstreaming in education. Interestingly trans-gender perspectives do not find even a single reference in any syllabus in the universities in Kerala. At the same time, central universities like Pondicherry University dared to incorporate transgender perspectives in their media syllabus.

From the findings it can be concluded that a proper gender policy in relation to higher education curriculum in general and media education in particular is need of the hour since gender related issues are being surged in all the spheres of the society including media. As media are considered as mirrors of the society, the best approach is to sensitize media to the gender-neutral practices. This is possible only when media education is mainstreamed both in theory and practice.

The present study is limited to the qualitative thematic analysis of the syllabi of PG journalism programmes offered by the universities in Kerala, and it is doesn't include pedagogical practices like classroom delivery, extracurricular activities, research practices that include research trends, assignment and conferences and seminars. Also important is an exploration of qualitative and quantitative representation of gender in students' admission, attendance, drop-out, performance, and placement. Equally significant is to explore how gender is represented in faculty and administration.

In short, gender mainstreaming of media education is all the more important this time when media are becoming more vulnerable areas of sexism and gender violence, both in terms of form and content as well as management and practices.

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