

GENDER MONITORING IN MEDIA

A report by an NGO calls for better gender balance and end of subjugation of women in Nepalese media
By Sanjaya Dhakal

Monitoring of print as well as electronic media of Nepal has exposed the inherent discriminations and subjugation against women, concluded the team of Sancharika Samuha – an NGO.

Following the intense monitoring of media coverage on May, June and July, the group has come up with report and recommendations. The team had monitored the major daily newspapers, some weeklies and some magazines for the three months whereas they monitored the prime time programs aired by Radio Nepal, Nepal Television and Channel Nepal for the month of August.

“We monitored the media using the 12-point tool adopted during the Beijing Platform of Action. The results show that although there are some improvements in the nature of coverage of women, they are yet to be satisfactory,” said Bandana Rana, president of Sancharika Samuha.

Declares Babita Basnet, general secretary of the Sancharika Samuha, who monitored the print media, “In everything they cover including news, analysis and features, women do not figure much.”

In every political or economic event, most newspapers, without exception, use the quotes of male members of society hardly giving any space to the views of women, Basnet asserts.

Recalling one instance, Basnet rues the lack of gender balance in the reports related to political development during the ‘search for new prime minister.’ “All the papers reported only about male candidates. They did not consider that a woman, too, could become an able prime minister.”

She, however, expresses satisfaction over the limited improvement in the projection of women. “In the past, newspapers use to publish names and photos of victims of rape and sexual abuse. But now they have changed that practice.”

The report states that most of the news about women were related to crime, rape, witchcraft, entertainment etc. They got very few space in hard economic and political news.

Likewise, Arati Chataut, a leading TV producer, presented a report of the monitoring of electronic media. She also pointed that women were being typecast in traditional and conservative mould in most of the tele-serials, soap operas and other programs. The report stated that the women were mostly being promoted as commodities.

Chataut has made a realistic observations regarding the portrayal of women in mainstream electronic media. “There is a strong imprint of patriarchal society and its traditional values in almost all the popular tele-serials, which are perpetuating the same-old discriminations against women,” she notes. “In all the tele-serials, women are shown to be either glamorous characters or are expected to make sacrifice for the greater good of the family.”

The Sancharika Samuha has been monitoring media through gender lens since 1998. It has brought out periodic reports on this issue. Such reality-based reports would go a long way in helping society see reason and correct the inherent faults. For without empowering the women, there is no way a country can expect to develop or prosper.

However, this situation of imbalanced representation of women in media is not a unique feature of Nepal. At a recent conference on women in the South Asian region, delegates asserted that the media in South Asia continues to display a feudal mindset by trivializing crimes against women, insidiously damning sex

workers and perpetuating frivolous stereotypes.

At a meeting of the South Asian Free Media Association and the Sancharika Samuha of Journalists held in Kathmandu on June this year, women activists and experts concurred that the portrayal of women is similar across South Asia.

Declares leading Nepalese television anchor and the president of a women's forum in Kathmandu, Bandana Rana, "In everything -- advertising, television programming, newspapers and magazines, films and video games -- women and girls are likely to be shown at home, performing domestic chores, as sex objects who exist primarily to service men, and are the natural recipients of beatings, harassment, sexual assault and murder."

The participants had also adopted a declaration at the end of the conference urging all concerned "to refrain from presenting women as inferior to men and exploiting them as sexual objects."

It urged authorities across South Asia "to re-orient and re-educate policy makers, editors, reporters, script writers, producers, crews and camerapersons on gender issues in order to perceive, portray and project woman as equal."