



## **Position of Women in Kannada Television Channels: An Evaluation**

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### **Abstract**

*In 1965, Pratima Puri created history when she became India's first television news reader. At a time when the bigger sister - cinema was not considered a respectable place for women, Ms Puri dared to be on the small screen. When she interviewed the first man in space, Yuri Gagarin, many young girls nurtured a desire to explore a career in the television industry. In the 1980s, news readers Geetanjali Iyer, Salma Sultana, Rini Khanna and Manjari Joshi became household names even as television was synonymous with Doordarshan that ruled the air. The number of women journalists is more than the overall number of journalists 30 years ago and some of them such as Shereen Bhan (managing editor of CNBC-TV18) occupy top positions in media organisations. While this seems fair enough for women at the national level, the scenario is not so promising for women working in regional television channels. In this paper, I have evaluated top positions occupied by media women in Kannada television industry.*

**Keywords:** *Women Journalists, Kannada TV Channels, Women Anchors, Women Journalists, Media Women in Television.*

### **Introduction**

Nanjangudu Thirumalamba is considered as the first woman journalist of Karnataka. She started the first women's magazine 'Karnataka Nandini' in 1916. There were 12 issues during the four years of its existence and it was carefully scrutinized by the Britishers as Thirumalamba was inspired by Bal Gangadhar Tilak. Since there was no printing in Mysore, Ms Thirumalamba travelled to Dharwad to get the magazine printed.<sup>†</sup> R. Kalyanamma was another woman journalist who started a monthly magazine called *Saraswathi* in Bengaluru in 1920. The magazine had illustrations along with articles that questioned male dominance and

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<sup>†</sup>The Role and Problems of Women Journalists in Pre-Independent India  
[http://14.139.116.20:8080/jspui/bitstream/10603/164422/14/11\\_chapter%203.pdf](http://14.139.116.20:8080/jspui/bitstream/10603/164422/14/11_chapter%203.pdf)

argued for women's equality. Ms Kalyanamma eventually became the President<sup>‡</sup> of the *Kannada Journalist Congregation* at the Kannada Sahitya Parishat (1940). Vyarawalla was the first woman photojournalist in our country. In the 1930s when women were hardly seen in public life, she captured various moments of World War II on her camera. These photographs were published under the pseudonym Dalda 13.

In 1965, Pratima Puri created history when she appeared on air as India's first television news reader. During those times, cinema was not considered a respectable place for women and Ms Puri dared to be on the small screen and inspired many girls to dream of a career in the television industry by interviewing the first man in space, Yuri Gagarin with poise. News readers Geetanjali Iyer, Salma Sultana, Rini Khanna and Manjari Joshi became household names in a country where television was synonymous with Doordarshan (DD) that ruled the air in the 1980s.

After the Indian Government introduced Liberalisation, Privatisation and Globalisation (LPG) policy in 1991, the floodgates were opened for private media players as well as for foreigners to set up production houses. As a result, there was a spurt to recruit women as news anchors to engage attention. However, though many women journalists made it to the studio and to the field, it took some time for them to break the glass ceiling and head a team consisting mainly of men. One of the earliest women whose name figured in title heads was that of Radhika Roy<sup>§</sup> (co-founder and Co-Chairperson, New Delhi Television), wife of NDTV co-founder and managing director Prannoy Roy<sup>\*\*</sup>.

Today DD Directorate General consists of two women Ms Kalpana Singh and Ms Mitali Chatterjee besides 18 men officers. The presence of women in media has more than doubled in the last 20 years but still, they constitute only 28.6 percent of the media workforce in Asia and the Pacific.<sup>††</sup> Men outnumber women 4:1 in India. This figure is in consideration with the fact that as of September 2018, there were 872 private satellite channels and the ratio of women representation in the media industry has increased when compared with women in the past. The Central Government's policy to encourage women in workstations has also contributed to more women pursuing professions. Likewise, there should have been more women at the middle and top levels which is not significantly visible when we look at male-female ratio especially in regional television channels.

## Review of Literature

A review of literature on relative subjects revealed interesting details. In the present changing scenarios, work-life balance for women in the field of journalism has become

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<sup>‡</sup> Shruti Sharada (March 2020): R.Kalyanamma: Karnataka's Pioneer Journalist who wrote on Women's Issues, Feminism In India (FII) Intersectional Feminism-Desi Style!

<sup>§</sup> Wikipedia [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Radhika\\_Roy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Radhika_Roy)

<sup>\*\*</sup> Wikipedia [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prannoy\\_Roy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prannoy_Roy)

<sup>††</sup>Dr. Jayanthi Ramadorai, *Work Life Balance of Women Professionals in Media Industry in India*

important from professional and personal viewpoint<sup>‡‡</sup>. Good HRD initiatives towards journalists will create an improvement in family and professional life of females who are working in this field, the study conducted by Shiv Kumar, Dr Shivalinge Gowda M and Prof H J Chandra Shekar added.

Women journalists in English media get better beats to cover like politics, sports and crime.<sup>§§</sup> There is a big gap in terms of facilities that are being offered to women journalists in English and those working in other media. Women journalists in English media are better paid and have better working conditions than their counterparts working in other vernacular media companies. There is gender equality in the English media in terms of opportunities, promotions and salaries. Even those on contract basis have better facilities at the workplace. This information was found in a literature review. The number of profile of women in Kannada television channels on online sites are more on glamorous women anchors in general entertainment channels (GECs) than hardcore news (women) journalists followed by historical profile of women in the media industry. Problems faced by women journalists get widely covered by online and print publications. These are issues relating to media women's anxiety, despair, depression and burn out due to late night shifts, last minute work in advertising, and pressure of 'perfect smile and look,' which increased over the years. However, some of the women journalists have spoken about molestation and harassment at workplace and while reporting after the #metoo movement gained momentum. Sadly, no study has touched on the underrepresentation of women in top positions in regional (Kannada) television channels.

### **Research Questions**

After a study of literature, my research has attempted to find answers to two main research questions:

Q1: Are women journalists sufficiently represented in various top positions in Kannada News and GECs channels?

Q2: Is there adequate representation of women across the organizational hierarchy in Kannada TV channels?

### **Methodology**

I have used a content analysis method as well as conducted online interviews through WhatsApp of 20 journalists working in various Kannada news channels for data collection. The respondents were sent 15 questions and there was scope to add comments.

Besides DD Chandana which is a general Kannada channel under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, there are many private local and regional channels. The news

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<sup>‡‡</sup> Shiv Kumar, Dr Shivalinge Gowda M and Prof H J Chandra Shekar, Work-Life Balance: Empirical Study on Female Journalists in Media Industry.

<sup>§§</sup>Manjushree G Naik (Jul-Sep 2015), *The Status of Women Journalists in Kannada Press*, Journal of Media and Social Development. Vol.3, Issue 3.

content of all 11 private regional Kannada news channels – Suvarna News, News18 Kannada, Kasturi Newz 24, Public TV, TV9, Raj TV (Raj News Kannada), Digvijay TV, Power TV, BTV and TV5 Kannada, was analysed from June 1-30, 2020. At least one female journalist from each of these channels was included.

The regional GEC in Kannada are Basava, Colors Kannada, Zee Kannada, Public Music, Dangal Kannada, Raj Music, Star Suvarna, Kasturi TV, Udaya Comedy, Zee Picchar, Colors Super, Udaya Movies, Udaya Music, Raj, Colors Kannada, Public Movies and Zee Kannada. Chintu TV is a popular Kids channel, while Sri Sankara TV and Sri Venkateswara Bhakti Channel 2 are spiritual channels. The weekly BARC TRP<sup>\*\*\*</sup> list of Kannada channels were evaluated for the week 30 May to 5 June 2020.

### Findings and Discussion

Hundreds of journalists are employed in regional television channels. Power TV which was started in 2018 has 250 employees on its payroll. It was difficult to get exact figures about women journalists working in various positions at any of the channels mainly due to Covid-19 in June 2020. This was the time when the media industry witnessed lay-offs, 15 days work/15-day salary and compulsory leave without pay. However, approximately women represent 30% of the workforce in these media companies.

Discussion with journalists of various television channels revealed that except for Radha Hiregowdar who is the anchor chief at BTV News, others have not made it to top positions. Jyoti Irravattur was the editor of Focus TV which closed down six months after its launch. There are senior anchors like Navitha Jain and Sowmya Malali of News18 Kannada while young women journalists work either as sub-editors/reporters or anchors. No woman has made it to the position of editorial director, executive editor or editor in Kannada news channels. Popular women TV journalist Tejeswini Ramesh who joined politics when she was at the peak of her career, is completely out of the limelight.

Salary-wise, men and women receive similarly in the average low pay range and regional television journalists take home less pay compared to their counterparts working in national channels. NDTV India's news anchor and managing editor Ravish Kumar<sup>†††</sup> is one of the highest earning reporters with net worth INR 143 crore. Sweta Singh<sup>‡‡‡</sup>, famous news presenter of Aaj Tak is reportedly Rs 15 crore net worth and Aaj Tak executive editor and news anchor Anjana Om Kashyap<sup>§§§</sup> (AOK) gets approximately Rs 10 crore annual income.

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<sup>\*\*\*</sup> Broadcast Audience Research Council India, *Kannada TV Channels TRP Ratings Weekly List: June 2020 Updated*, <https://www.1films.in/2020/04/top-kannada-tv-channels-barc-trp-ratings.html>

<sup>†††</sup> Dhoot Ridhi CA (August 2020), Ravish Kumar Net Worth 2020: Salary, Income, Awards, Bio, Assets, [caknowledge.com https://caknowledge.com/ravish-kumar-net-worth/](https://caknowledge.com/ravish-kumar-net-worth/)

<sup>‡‡‡</sup> Choudhary Raju, CA (September 10, 2020), <https://caknowledge.com/sweta-singh-net-worth/>

<sup>§§§</sup> Dhoot Ridhi CA (August 28, 2020), Anjana Om Kashyap Net Worth 2020: Bio, Car, Salary, Career, House, [caknowledge.com https://caknowledge.com/anjana-om-kashyap-net-worth/](https://caknowledge.com/anjana-om-kashyap-net-worth/)

The salary of news anchors in Kannada channels is peanuts compared to celebrity news anchors at the national level.

Men outnumber women in Kannada channels by 4:1 across various portfolios and their participation is in single or two digits at the upper level of hierarchy particularly in governance, which denotes roles on company's boards of directors. Many media companies have women on governing boards because of their membership in families owning the company (mothers, wives, daughters and daughters-in-law), instead of their ability to secure these positions through advancement. Ms Kavery Kalanithi is the Executive Director of Sun TV Network by virtue of her being the wife of Kalanidhi Maran. Likewise, in Karnataka, Kasthuri Newz 24 and Kasthuri TV are owned by former chief minister H D Kumaraswamy's wife Anita Kumaraswamy of JD(S) who has absolutely no journalistic experience.

Prominent women who occupy top positions in national news television are – Shereen Bhan, Managing Editor of CNBC-TV18; Shweta Singh, Executive Editor of Special Programming, Aaj Tak; Mini Menon (former Femina Miss India Asia Pacific), Executive Editor of Bloomberg TV; Sonia Singh\*\*\*\*, Editorial Director & President of NDTV ethics committee; Preeti Choudhry, Editor, India Today TV; and Samyabrata Ray Goswami, senior executive editor, Republic TV.

Most women who occupy high positions in national channels enjoy certain affiliations which could be journalistic/ bureaucratic or membership in powerful/influential families. For instance, Barkha Dutt of NDTV who rose to top position very quickly is the daughter of a popular journalist Prabha Dutt†††† who worked for Hindustan Times.

Associations set up for and by women journalists such as Indian Women's Press Corps, Network of Women in Media, India are just a handful. Karnataka Women Journalists Association†††† was launched only in March 2019 and consists of 300 members.

The organizational chart of some of the flagships that operate private Kannada channels itself is quite informal. Take for example, VRL Group that runs Digvijay TV. The Board of Directors includes 10 men and two independent female directors of the company. Besides, the top brass of both Suvarna TV and Digvijaya TV networks is a Member of Parliament – Rajeev Chandrasekhar and Dr Vijay Sankeshwar, respectively.

The number of female anchors is equivalent to male anchors in national news channels as well as GECs. In Kannada television industry, there are less number of female anchors in news channels.

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\*\*\*\* Wikipedia [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sonia\\_Singh\\_\(journalist\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sonia_Singh_(journalist))

†††† Krishnamachari S V (June 6, 2017): 'Interesting facts about Prannoy Roy's news Channel NDTV, its journalists and alleged irregularities. International Business Times. <https://www.ibtimes.co.in/ndtv-here-are-some-interesting-facts-about-news-channel-its-journalists-promoters-prannoy-729647>

†††† Deccan Herald (March 24, 2019), 'Women scribes launch exclusive association.'

Though women presenters find a place in almost all major 'Live' sports, they are being used to charm the viewers with their looks and attire and no one is interested in knowing their viewpoint. Another noteworthy feature is that selection of women sports anchors is based on their glamorous popularity (Mandira Bedi) or their affinity. Famous TV sports journalist Mayanti Langer<sup>§§§§</sup> is wife of Indian cricketer Binny Stuart and is associated with Star Sports Network. Prior to her marriage with Binny Stuart in 2012, she anchored Football tournaments and Commonwealth Games. Post-marriage, she has been anchoring major cricket tournaments.

### **Conclusion**

From the study, it was found that while women have broken the glass ceiling and taken the big leap in national media, they are taking wobbly steps to climb the ladder in Kannada TV channels. My study found that nearly 60% working women journalists do not sustain beyond 10 years in the field. Women in national television who have reached top positions are those who have been in the media industry for two decades or kinship of powerful people in bureaucracy/leading political parties or media houses. Very often, affinity to those who are powerful or influential plays a key role in quickly moving up the career ladder even in the media industry.

The attrition rate of women TV journalists is very high in Karnataka due to various factors such as HR policy which overlooks their need to balance their personal life with profession. Also, they are a victim of gender bias and male chauvinism. After settling in marital life, many women chose other professions that have convenient working hours such as content writing and teaching in colleges and universities.

### **Limitations of the study**

During data collection I underwent some hardships which can be termed limitations to the study. Some of the respondents were not forthcoming with answers to a few questions. This hindered in-depth discussion on many aspects. The sample size of the interview was restricted to 20 respondents instead of 50 because of their busy schedule and reluctance to respond on gender-based and office issues.

Another constraint was that secondary data available in the form of literature pertains to other issues such as top or popular female journalists/anchors in India but none have strived to understand in-depth how and why historically women have relinquished their profession particularly at the regional level.

Since many of the respondents answered in monosyllables to certain questions, the researcher could not adopt a case study of women's position in the regional television industry. This aspect could have probably added value to the present study.

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<sup>§§§§</sup>Blog of National Institute of Mass Communication & Journalism, Ahmedabad (February 27, 2019): Top 9 Female Journalists of India.



## **Implications**

My study opens a window to the disparity in professional status of regional women TV journalists in comparison with women in national channels. It also indicates the factors that contribute and those that hinder rise to higher positions which can be further evaluated by future researchers from different angles.

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