



Gender Bias Issues of Women of Uttarakhand and Media Efforts

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Abstract

This paper examines the pervasive gender bias faced by women in Uttarakhand, India, despite their substantial contributions to the region's economy and society. Uttarakhand's women are significantly involved in agriculture, forestry, and cattle care, yet remain marginalized in family decision-making due to the entrenched patriarchal structure of society. The paper highlights that even with increased educational opportunities, the socio-economic status of women has not improved proportionately. The study reveals that women are overburdened with responsibilities, often working up to 16 hours a day while also facing health issues due to malnutrition and lack of adequate medical facilities. The patriarchal norms continue to restrict women's access to economic resources and decision-making power, perpetuating their dependency on men.

The paper also explores the role of media in addressing and highlighting women's issues in Uttarakhand. A comparative analysis of two prominent newspapers, Amar Ujala and Hindustan Times, demonstrates that despite the critical nature of women's issues, these are grossly underrepresented in media coverage. The findings show that only a small percentage of the print area is devoted to women's rights, with news stories dominating the coverage, followed by editorials, columns, and articles. The analysis underscores the need for more significant media engagement in advocating for women's rights and addressing gender bias in Uttarakhand.

Keywords:

Gender bias, Uttarakhand, women's rights, patriarchal society, media representation, socio-economic status, health issues, agriculture, media analysis.

Introduction

Uttarakhand stands out as one of the few states in India where an overwhelming number of women have always been a part of active workforce, due to their total involvement with agriculture, forest production, cattle care and dairying. In spite of her major contribution in hill economy she still has less say in major family decisions because of the patriarchal nature of the hill society. Even the education of girls has not led to any significant changes in their socio-economic status; the educated Daughter-in-law is expected to work hard in the fields and forest. By and large women

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are still dependent upon money order economy. Therefore, the women of Uttarakhand need to have more avenues for income generation if they have to be freed from dependence on men. The rural women in hill villages are the worst hit by liquor consuming habits of their husbands and other male members of their family, partial unemployment due to shrinking agriculture and of social and family neglect despite working hard for 16 hours a day to keep their family going

Socio Economic Status of Women in Uttarakhand

Sex Ratio in Uttarakhand

The male female ratio of population in Uttarakhand is 963 to 1000 males. The sex ratio of Uttarakhand (963) is better than the national average (933).

This may possibly be due to the increasing trend of Uttarakhand men seeking to find jobs in the state itself and thereby reversing the earlier practice of men moving to Delhi and other places in large numbers in search of employment.

The low sex rate is also attributable to low female literacy, lack of nutrition and health facilities and, of course, the patriarchal order of the society. One may analyze these factors, in the context of Uttarakhand women. The high and low of sex ratio are varied among the districts. It is not worthy that the sex ratio in the eight hilly districts of Chamoli (1021), Rudraprayag(1120), Tehri (1078), Pauri (1103), Almora (1142), Bageshwar(1093), Pithoragarh (1021) and Champawat(981) have been to the advantage of women. It thereby confirms to the saying of Women in Villages and Men in Towns.

On the other hand, the sex ratio of Hardwar (879), Dehradun (902), Nainital (933), Udham Singh Nagar (919) and Uttarkashi (958) are so low as to bring down the state average. These are mostly plain areas and are considered more developed. The reason may have to be sought in the migration of men from higher attitudes and interior areas, to the more developed areas in search of jobs. The women in the interior continue to stay back, look after the land and sustain the families, thereby pushing up the sex ratio.

The men migrating to towns and developed areas have swelled the male population in Dehradun and Nainital. Hardwar and Udham Singh Nagar as plain areas.

Educational Status

Uttarakhand stands out as one the more developed states of India in the educational status of its population. Its growth in educational level, particularly for the females has been phenomenal between 1991 and 2011.

Literacy Rate - (1971-2011)

Table: (3-A)

Year	Total	Male	Female
1971	31.02	45.57	15.45
1981	39.29	53.85	24.11



1991	57.80	72.80	41.70
2001	72.28	84.01	60.26
2011	78.82	87.40	70.01
Growth in 40 years	47.80	41.83	54.56

Source: Uttaranchal Statistical Diary: Statistical Department of Uttarakhand

Above table shows that the total education growth rate Uttarakhand is 47.80 % whereas women education in 40 years is grownup to 54.56 percent while growth rate of men is 41.83 % which is remarkable data in the field of women empowerment.

Economic Status of Women in Uttarakhand

The economic status of women in Uttarakhand is low although women have been playing a very important role in the economy of the state for generations. Being a money order economy, where men migrate in search of work the task of planning for the community is left to women. Women bear the burden of not only looking after the family and trudging long distances for water but are also left to farm the lands.

The new state was formed by a great sacrifice and with the aspiration of the women – the dream and vision of a sustainable society one that would be in harmony with the nature that surrounds the region. Forests cover almost 65% of the area and the majority of the population is dependents on these forests for their living⁸. The women have visualized a state where they can effectively guide the development of the region in a way that benefits all and is also sustainable.

The extent of women's contribution is aptly highlighted by a micro study conducted in the Indian Himalayas by ministry of agriculture in 1987. It was found that on a one hectare farm a pair of bullock works 1064 hours, a man 1212 hours and a woman 3485 hours in a calendar year. Women are estimated to continue on an average between 55 to 60 percent of the total labor and except ploughing and transporting the final produce from the fields which are primarily male tasks.

Thus, 98.54 percent of the rural women work force participates in agriculture and cattle. Even where women participate in other activities, the latter are over and above the agriculture work and not a substitute. Women who work in jobs (0.73 percent) and in labor (0.73 percent) to have to work in their own agricultural fields. Only about 2.21 percent women in rural areas work exclusively in an eight-hour schedule of 10 am to 5 pm.

However, working in the land and undertaking other Para agricultural activities has not meant women's economic empowerment. Women in Uttarakhand do not own the land on which they are working. Nor does this give them the power to make decisions in major economic matters concerning property, sale and investment. Nor do the land yield so much production or income that it gives women the much-needed cash and decision-making power to look after her needs and those of the children.



3.3 Health Conditions:

The Uttarakhand has 49.10% (4163161) women of its population². More important is the factor that women in this region contribute major share in family's income and livelihood. Their participation is found in almost all fields of the rural occupations. As a result, the women in Uttarakhand are overburdened with the work load, which leads them to work since early hours of morning till late night. Not having been supplemented with adequate nutritious suffer from chronic energy deficiency, malnutrition, pre-and post-delivery problems.

One of the most common complaint women have been leukemia, poor nutrition and anemia and body ache. Hard work and lack of protein have resulted in low height and weight of the women; when measured by Body Mass Index weight and height, most of the women and girls are below normal. In the rural areas of Uttarakhand, 50 percent of women, 70 percent of girls and 80 percent of children are suffering from anemia. Sixty percent children in rural areas are not getting adequate nutrition. According to the government data 45.6 percent women had anemia in 2004. 77.40 percent of children of the age 6-35 months are anemic (2004).

Also in the remote hilly areas, there are no hospital facilities available; PHC sub centers are few and far between and the ANMs and Health workers are rarely available. Carrying down the women, who are in pain, has been often dangerous and nearly impossible. Unless there is an emergency the women are never known to have been taken to hospitals in the rural areas. One is not sure, how many of these babies and the mothers were really safe, though the data from the Health Directorate, Uttarakhand puts, safe delivery, at 24.2 percent (2003) and 51.2 percent in 2004. But the official data itself gives the figures for delivery in hospital at 18.1 percent (2004) only. No wonder the infant mortality rate is as high as 52 percent (2003) and 44 percent (2004). One is of course, unaware of the official data on female mortality rate or maternal mortality rate. Obviously, there is good number cases of frequent pregnancies and lack of access to family planning methods. 21 percent women had no access to family planning. 24.70 percent deliveries are within a period of 24 months of the birth of the previous child.

In the absence of the official data, one has to depend on field surveys undertaken by the NGOs and other agencies. According to one such survey undertaken by the International Institute of Population Sciences in 1998-99, the infant mortality rate is as high as 37.6. Its figures confirm that 45.8% deliveries are by Dais and 9.8% by midwives, ANMs and nurses. Only 24.8% are delivered by doctors¹¹. On the nutrition front too women's and Children position is precarious. 45.6 percent women and 77.4 percent of 6-35 months children suffer from anemia. Most of them belong to severe to moderate anemia category. Some 46.6 percent children are chronically undernourished and even stunted. Some 7.6 percent children are acutely under nourished. Through 65.9% women breast feed their children for first 3 months and on average children are breast fed for about 2 years, this does not seem to include adequate nutrition supplement. Mother's own nutrition also can be deficient. Only a quarter of the pregnant mothers have received any proper checkup and iron and folic acid supplements.



Media Efforts:

The role of media is crucial to the issue of women's rights, both in terms of how media cover the issue, and how media may be used as a tool to help activists and governments raise awareness and implement programs on this issue. Media had still played effective roles in minimizing domestic violence against women even media can play a lead role in the fight against violence against women and violation of human rights regarding the women. As media is the eye, ear and limbs of the society they could help a great deal in mitigating violence against women.

Coverage of women’s issues by newspapers in Uttarakhand: A Comparative study

To analyze women’s issues printed in newspapers, equality, health, education, sexual harassment, violence, police atrocities and crime against women related issues were selected. All kind of printed material related to these issues as articles, news stories, analysis, editorials, letter to editor, column etc. were taken for analyses.

Two newspapers, one of Hindi and one of English were selected for analysis. Hindi newspaper is ‘Amar Ujala’ while another English newspaper is ‘Hindustan Times’. Both of papers are published from Dehradun and well circulated in the Uttarakhand.

Year 2006 was selected to study the contents of the newspapers. In view of the voluminous data, the scope of the study was narrowed down further through systematic sampling. Thus, starting from 1 January 2006 every fifth issue of the daily was selected and analyzed throughout the whole year i.e. till December 2006. The selection of every fifth issue ensures equal representation of each day of week in the data. The total number of newspapers analyzed are 146 (73 issues each newspaper). Supplement magazines were not considered in study because of their specialty i.e. youth, film, career etc.

Print Area of the Newspaper

Newspapers	Average no. of pages	Area of per page (length X width) Sq.cm	Average Print Area of single issue (Sq.cm)
Hindustan Times	24	51x33=1683	40,392
Amar Ujala	16	50x33=1650	26,400

It is shown from above table that average no. of pages in Hindustan Times are 24 while Amar Ujala published average 16 pages in a single issue. Print area of single issue of Hindustan Times and Amar Ujala is 40,392 sq.cm and 26,400 sq.cm respectively.

Coverage of women’s issues in newspapers during 2006

Name of Newspapers	Area (in Sq.cm)			
	Single issue	Total (singlex73)	Women’s Rights related issues	Percentage



Hindustan Times	40,392	29,48,616	12,384.00	0.42
Amar Ujala	26,400	19,27,200	12,334.00	0.64

With regard to above table, it is to make clear that the total number of each newspaper taken for analysis were 73. The above table shows that the total percent of covered area for women's issues in the Hindustan Times, and Amar Ujala is 0.42 percent and 0.64 percent respectively. It shows that the space given to women's issues was very less.

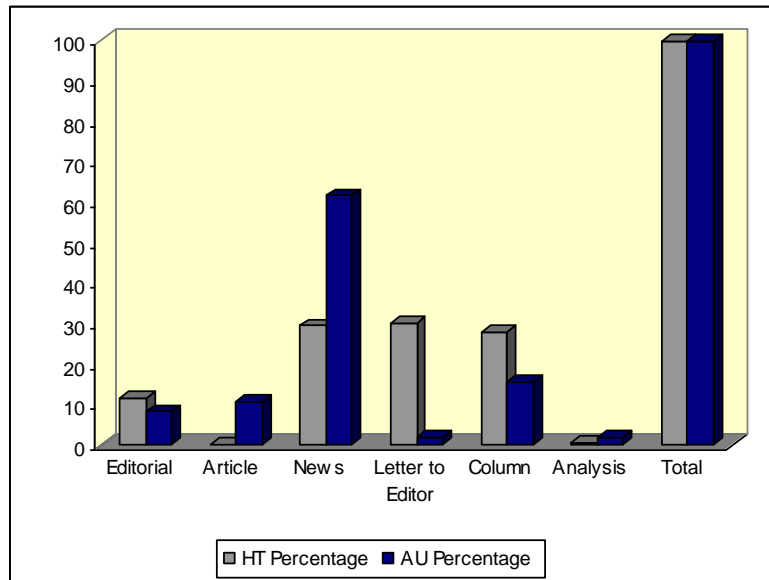
Importance given by newspapers for women's issues

Importance	Hindustan Times		Amar Ujala	
	Area (Sq.cm)	Percentage	Area (Sq.cm)	Percentage
Editorial	1287.80	10.4	936.24	8.35
Article	1027.84	8.3	1195.25	10.66
News	7244.54	58.5	6915.86	61.68
Letter to Editor	272.42	2.2	202.94	1.81
Column	2291.20	18.5	1733.45	15.46
Analysis	260.20	2.1	251.61	2.04
Total	12,384.00	100	12,334.00	100

The space given to covered story shows mostly the importance of story e.g. editorial is written on very crucial issue. The above table shows the importance of women's coverage given by in these newspapers. 'Hindustan Times' gave 10.4 percent space in editorial to women's issues in one year i.e. 2006 while Amar Ujala' gave 8.35 percent of its space for these types of issues in editorial. Women's rights related coverage was covered 8.3 percent in the form of articles in 'Hindustan Times' while in 'Amar Ujala' 10.66 percent articles were written on women's issues. Near about half of stories i.e. 58.5 percent are in news form in 'Hindustan Times' and depends on incidents while 'Amar Ujala' gave 61.68 percent space for news items for such types of coverage. The reactions of readers reflect in the form of letter to editor, which occupied only 2.2 percent space in Hindustan times related to women's rights while 'Amar Ujala' gave 1.81 percent space for letter to editor related to women's issues. 'Hindustan Times' gave its 18.5 percent space in columns for women's rights related coverage out of women's related whole coverage while 'Amar Ujala' gave only 15.46 percent space in columns for women's related coverage. Analysis on these issues got least 2.1 percent in 'Hindustan Times' while Amar Ujala gave 2.04 percent space for analysis of women's issues.



Graphical Presentation:



Graphical presentation of space covered for the different women issues by Amar Ujala (Hindi daily) and Hindustan Times (English daily) publisher from Dehradun the capital of Uttarakhand

Conclusion

The study concludes that women in Uttarakhand, despite their crucial role in sustaining the state's economy, continue to face severe gender biases rooted in the region's patriarchal social structure. Their contributions to agriculture and household income are not matched by their empowerment in decision-making, economic independence, or social status. The patriarchal mindset still dominates, limiting women's control over resources and their ability to influence major decisions, both within the family and in the broader community.

Health issues among women are particularly alarming, exacerbated by their heavy workload, poor nutrition, and inadequate access to healthcare services. The prevalence of anemia, chronic energy deficiency, and other health problems reflect the harsh realities of women's lives in rural Uttarakhand. These issues are compounded by the lack of healthcare infrastructure in remote areas, making it difficult for women to receive timely medical attention.

The role of the media, which is pivotal in shaping public opinion and driving social change, is found to be lacking in addressing these pressing issues. The analysis of media coverage in two leading newspapers reveals a significant underrepresentation of women's issues. While news articles do cover incidents related to women's rights, the overall space and depth of coverage are insufficient to bring about meaningful awareness and change. The study advocates for more proactive and sustained media efforts to highlight gender issues, promote women's rights, and support their empowerment in Uttarakhand.

The findings call for concerted efforts from policymakers, social organizations, and the media to address the deep-seated gender inequalities and improve the socio-economic conditions of women



in Uttarakhand. There is a critical need for initiatives that provide women with greater access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities, ultimately leading to their empowerment and equality in society.

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