Personal and Professional Traits of Media Persons in Kerala: A Gender Perspective

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Abstract: The studies revealed that the way news as a social construct is shaped and the newsroom practice as a professional trait is nurtured based on the characteristics of journalists, the news processors. Some argue that the news values and newsroom cultures were formed in such a way that caters to the interests of the dominant male folk. Consequently, change in journalistic characteristics, gender in particular, made remarkable turns in news production. If so, understanding the characteristics of journalists in Kerala will be an indication to the influential factors that shape news in this part of the world. The present study undertakes a survey research among one sixth of Kerala journalists (N=541) to explore the trends in a gender perspective.

Keywords – Gender, Kerala Journalists, Newsroom Culture, Personal Traits, Professional Traits, Transgender journalists, Women Journalists

I. INTRODUCTION

Is journalism shaped by the characteristics of packaging hands? If so, what is the role of gender in such a profession? Everbach (2006) and Gist (1993) observed that the gender characteristics of news processors would reflect in news values and newsroom culture. In the similar vein, Gao and Martin-Kratzer (2011) argue that the news values and newsroom cultures were shaped in a way that caters to the interests of the dominant male folk. So the news, a social construct, relied more upon male concerns that reinforced legitimated values and power structures. Entry of women into the male-dominated journalism is on the path of rise. Does it affect the way journalism practiced? Allan (2005) observed that this has influenced the way news shaped and the newsroom culture nurtured. The more the women entered the field the more the social issues were focused, women and their stories packed in a positive way, and the more women interest stories found space and time in media (Graber, 1978; Mills, 1997; Morahan-Martin, 1998; Fuller, 2004; Allan, 2005; Gao & Martin-Kratzer, 2011).

It is from this background, an attempt is made to examine this trend among the journalists in Kerala, a Southern Indian state. And, the study assumes more significance as the sex ratio of the state is 1084 as per results of Census 2011 and women in the state fare well in empowerment indices. The study seeks the representational characteristics of genders in the field of journalism in Kerala. Not the effects but the characteristics alone are under scrutiny. Gender specific characteristics of journalists might point at the direction to which journalism in Kerala is oriented.

Gender is widely considered as a social construct based on the role of being male, female, or transgender rather than distinguishing them on biological differences. In this sense, gender predefines a person’s cultural role in a society. And this role is limited for women when compared to their male counterparts. Unfortunately, transgenders are not a gender minority to be studied so far as the research in the field is concerned.

Men, in general, engage in the role which is more public whereas women are restricted to the role which is more private in nature. Further, women’s role is attached to the private sphere of home, family, private relations and domestic affairs while men’s role is assumed to be suitable for public spheres like politics, economics, and foreign affairs (Gilligan, 1982; Donovan, 1994; Youngs, 2004; Harp & Tremayne, 2006).

Based on the gender specific private/public dichotomy, gender roles are predetermined by the society. At the same time, transgenders, in most of the societies, are considered either as males or as females having no social existence as themselves. And men and women are expected to play their social roles that are actually prescribed by a male dominated society. This social expectation is taken over to the journalism field too. As a
result, femininity of female journalists defines their journalism works as well (Sanders & Rock, 1988; Zoonen, 1998; Chambers, Steiner, & Fleming, 2004; Gao & Martin-Kratzer, 2011).

Studies revealed that increased participation of women in newsrooms changed their traditional role-related works in journalism, especially in developed nations. Resultantly, they were designated to cover the traditional masculine stories of politics, economics and crimes belonging to the public sphere. Yet, inequality in newsroom is not fully erased and so they struggle to achieve the same. In addition, media contents reflect men’s perspectives due to lesser women representation. It is evident in women depiction in soft/hard stories in media. Even when they were represented, they seemed to take a human-interest angle. Thus the news decisions and the news cultures depict men’s perspectives in the field of journalism (Chambers, Steiner, & Fleming, 2004; Armstrong, Wood, & Nelson, 2006; Wallis, 2006; Lu, 2006; Gao, & Martin-Kratzer, 2011).

Characteristics of journalists are thus playing a vital role in determining news angles and in defining news cultures. The present study seeks to analyze how gender as a demographic variable influences the professional and personal characteristics of media persons in Kerala.

The total number of journalists in Kerala is 3,104 as per the PRD directory of 2014. Approximately, there is one journalist per ten thousand people in the state.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Generally the study attempted to identify the role of gender in defining the personal and professional characteristics of media persons in Kerala, Southern Indian State.

To fulfill this mission, the following objectives were set:

1. To analyze how gender of media persons is associated with their personal characteristics such as age, economic class, marital status, personality type, political and religious affiliation and so on.

2. To analyze how gender of media persons is associated with their professional characteristics such as media education, work area, experience, member of journalistic organization, beat specialization, organizational change and so on.

III. METHODOLOGY

Population of the study is Kerala journalists who work in and out of the State for the media based in Kerala. And for analytical purposes, the population was geographically divided into four strata – North, Central, South and Outside Kerala – and again by the type of media – Online, Print, Radio, and Television. Samples were taken proportionately from each stratum and were analyzed with a gender perspective.

IV. VARIABLES OF THE STUDY

In order to study personal and professional dimensions of Kerala journalists focusing on their gender characteristics, the following variables are used:

Personal variables: age group, marital status, children, economic class, personality type, and political and religious affiliations.

Professional variables: region, media, education, media education, work nature, work area, monthly income, professional experience including cross media experience, special beat, promotional opportunity, organizational membership, and institutional change.

V. RESULTS

After detailing the population and sample profiles of media persons in Kerala, the study moves on to inquire in a gender perspective their demographic variables like age group, marital status, economic class, personality type, etc. and their professional variables like region, media, education, media education, work nature, work area, income, and experience. In short the focus is on the gender analysis of personal and professional traits of media persons in Kerala.

V.1 Journalists in Kerala: A Population Profile

As per results of Census 2011 published by The Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India, the sex ratio of the state of Kerala is 1084. And it is estimated that there are at least 25,000 transgender persons in Kerala, the first Indian state that envisaged a Transgender policy (The Indian Express, 2016, July 8). Total
number of journalists in Kerala is 3,104 as per the PRD directory of 2014. Approximately, there is one journalist per ten thousand people in the state.

### Table 1. Gender wise Distribution of Kerala Journalists by Media

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Media</th>
<th>Count &amp; Percentage</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Online</td>
<td></td>
<td>Female 12 (21.05)</td>
<td>57 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within Gender 4.2%</td>
<td>Male 45 (78.95)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Print</td>
<td></td>
<td>Female 159 (8)</td>
<td>1999 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within Gender 55.0%</td>
<td>Male 1840 (92)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio</td>
<td></td>
<td>Female 10 (13)</td>
<td>77 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within Gender 3.5%</td>
<td>Male 67 (87)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television</td>
<td></td>
<td>Female 108 (11.1)</td>
<td>971 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within Gender 37.4%</td>
<td>Male 863 (88.9)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Count &amp; Percentage 289 (9.3)</td>
<td>Male 2815 (90.7)</td>
<td>3104 (100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Source: PRD directory of 2014 published by Govt. of Kerala

Media-wise analysis shows that female is represented more in online media (21.5%) followed by radio (13%), television (11.1%) and print media (8%).

Of the total 289 female media persons, majority (55%) work in print media followed by television (37.4%) online (4.2%) and radio (3.5%). However, it is expected that if the trend of increasing representation in the online is continued, it will outnumber the traditional media very soon when the boom of online media in state is taken into account.

### V.2 Sample in General

The total sample size taken for the study is 541. It is about one sixth (17.43%) of the total population and is well represented by gender, region, medium, and the like.

Sample for the study were collected evenly (about 30%) from three regions in the state (North=163, Central=161, South=164) and the rest (N=53) from outside Kerala (9.8%). From each region, majority of samples was taken from regional journalistic centers/districts; Kozhikode (41.72%) from North, Ernakulam (52.8%) from Central, and Thiruvananthapuram (50.6%) from South whereas most of the samples from outside Kerala was collected from Delhi (84.9%), the national capital.

### Table 2. Region wise Distribution of the Sample by Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Transgender</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>South Kerala</td>
<td>135 (30.1%)</td>
<td>27 (32.1%)</td>
<td>2 (25%)</td>
<td>164 (30.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Kerala</td>
<td>131 (29.2%)</td>
<td>28 (33.3%)</td>
<td>2 (25%)</td>
<td>161 (29.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Kerala</td>
<td>136 (30.3%)</td>
<td>23 (27.4%)</td>
<td>4 (50%)</td>
<td>163 (30.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside Kerala</td>
<td>47 (10.5%)</td>
<td>6 (7.1%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>53 (9.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>449 (83.0%)</td>
<td>84 (15.5%)</td>
<td>8 (1.5%)</td>
<td>541 (100.0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Though the basic data source PRD Directory categorizes journalists into Male and Female, the survey conducted by the researcher revealed the existence of transgenders as well. Journalism in Kerala is male-dominated and the sample is not an exception (83%). Transgender journalists constitute a remarkable portion of the sample (1.5%) after the women folk (15.5%).

Male distribution of the sample is almost even when considering different regions under study. Female distribution is also more or less same except in the case of outside Kerala region. Regarding other gender the case is different as they tend to concentrate to North Kerala and it is notable that they are not distributed outside Kerala.

### V.3 Gender Dimension of Personal Characteristics

Personal variables included age group, marital status, children, economic class, personality type, and political and religious affiliation of journalists in Kerala.

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Majority of the journalists (65.1%) belong to middle class family, especially females (77.4%). Journalists belonging to lower class families (30.5%) tend to be a male in most occasions. Males, females and transgender lead the lower middle class, middle class and upper middle class categories respectively. Still, the difference is not statistically significant (p value = 0.089).

Females and transgenders are younger than their male counterparts. Majority of females (61.9%) are under the age group below 30 along with that of transgenders (62.5%) and most of them are below the age of 40. On the other hand, majority of males (40.5%) fall under the age group of 30-39 and one fourth of them (27.4%) are middle aged or older. And the difference is statistically significant (p value = 0.000).

Strikingly, conforming to the general notion, transgenders remained unmarried (75%) or got separated (12.5%). At the same time, gender majority - when society is concerned - including male (73.1%) and female journalists (59.5%) tend to get married. Divorce cases are relatively low among males (0.2%) in comparison with females (3.6%). Difference in marital status is statistically significant (p value = 0.000).

Though the journalists (75.8%), in general, tend to have an employed partner only male folks have unemployed or economically dependent partners (27.7%). And the difference in terms of partner’s profession is statistically significant (p value = 0.000).

In the case of married journalists, male folks tend to have children (79.6%) whereas female folks less likely to have children (44.2%). For transgenders there is no such difference exist and they evenly distributed to both group. Gender difference to have or not to have child is statistically significant (p value = 0.000).

Majority of the journalists (55.6%), especially transgenders (87.5%) assessed their personality as both extrovert and introvert. One tenth of the journalists place themselves under the category of introverts but the number of female journalists extremely low in this category (0.6%). At the same time, the extrovert group is led by female folk (44%) in which there are no transgenders at all. Gender wise differences in personality are statistically significant (p value = 0.037).

Despite of gender, majority of Kerala journalists (73.4%) are politically affiliated with one political front or the other. Transgenders (87.5%) are more leaned to political affiliation. Significance of the difference is not statistically commendable (p value = 0.654).

Most of the journalists (84.8%) are affiliated to one religion or the other. One seventh of Kerala journalists have no religious beliefs and other gender leads the table (25%) in this respect. There is a slight deterioration in religious belief starting from male to female and then to the transgender. But the tendency is not statistically significant (p value = 0.538).

Regarding occupational diseases, transgenders (37.5%) reported to have more such diseases than that of female (29.8%) and male journalists (24.5%). But this gender wise difference is not statistically significant (p value = 0.439).

V.4 Gender Dimension of Professional Characteristics

Personal variables included age group, marital status, children, economic class, personality type and political and religious affiliation of journalists in Kerala.
Professional variables were organized under the categories of region, media, education, media education, work nature, work area, monthly income, and experience including cross media experience, special beat, promotional opportunity, organizational membership and institutional change.

Table 4. Professional Characteristics of Kerala Journalists by Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional characteristics</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Pearson Chi-Square</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Transgender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having media education</td>
<td>78.6%</td>
<td>92.9%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization revealed</td>
<td>44.1%</td>
<td>51.2%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work area (reporting)</td>
<td>55.2%</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total experience in media (more than 5 years)</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>38.1%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience in working organization (upto 5 years)</td>
<td>47.9%</td>
<td>70.2%</td>
<td>62.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member of journalistic organization</td>
<td>53.9%</td>
<td>27.4%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in institution</td>
<td>39.0%</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promoted in job</td>
<td>60.4%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having cross media experience</td>
<td>21.2%</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having beat specialization</td>
<td>29.8%</td>
<td>23.8%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced inequality</td>
<td>51.9%</td>
<td>64.3%</td>
<td>75.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***p < .001, **p < .01, *p < .05

While all journalists in transgender category claimed to have media education, most of the female journalists reported to have it except a few (7.1%). On the other hand, remarkable portion of male journalists (21.4%) claimed no degree in journalism education. There is a significant distinction among different genders in terms of media education (p value = 0.004).

Journalists, in general, hesitated (55.1%) to reveal their organizational identity except the females among whom a simple majority (51.2%) revealed the identity. It is not surprising to note that vast majority of transgenders (75%) were not ready to reveal their organizational identity. Even then, the gender difference is not statistically significant (p value = 0.254).

Majority of journalists (56.9) belong to the reporting area of work irrespective of their gender. Females when compared to transgenders tend more to be a reporter (66.9%). There is little chance for females and no chance for transgenders to adorn a managing position. Area of photo/videography is not explored by the female folk yet. And work area wise specialization of gender categories is statistically significant (p value = 0.027).

Majority of the journalists (72.3%) are having the experience of more than five years as a whole. Still, half of the transgenders and simple majority of females (61.9%) are having less than five years of experience in the field of journalism. If total media experience is considered, the gender difference is highly significant (p value = 0.000).

On the other hand, more than half of the journalists are less experienced in their present organization (51.6%). Majority of females (70.2%) and transgenders (62.5%) are less experienced than males. And the gender wise difference in institutional experience is statistically significant (p value = 0.003).

Male journalist is likely to be a member of a journalistic organization (53.9%). But a female journalist (27.4%) followed by transgenders (12.5%) are less likely to be a member in a journalistic organization. The difference is statistically significant (p value = 0.000) among the gender categories.

Male (39%) and transgender journalists (37.5%) tend more to change their institution than their female counterparts (25%). Yet the gender has no significant role in this trend (p value = 0.051).

More than half of the journalists got career promotion at least once (55.6%). More males (60.4%) were promoted than their female counterparts (33.3%) and transgenders (25%) in particular. This is a statistically significant difference (p value = 0.000).

In terms of cross media experience, one fifth of the journalists in Kerala (21.1%), irrespective of their gender (p value = 0.834) have worked for different types of media.

Transgenders (50%) seem to be more specialized journalists in the field. Males (29.8%) have got a slight upper hand over females (23.8%) in terms of special beats. Still, the difference is not statistically significant (p value = 0.229).
Shockingly, more than half of the journalists (54.2%) experienced some kind of inequality based on caste, religion, sex, political affiliation etc., in their workplace. Transgenders (75%) experienced inequality the most followed by female (64.3%) and male journalists (54%). Since, about half of the journalists experienced inequality irrespective of their gender, the difference is not statistically significant (p value = 0.055).

VI. DISCUSSION

Gender-wise analysis of both personal and professional characteristics of Kerala journalists are more or less in consent with previous studies in the field. In consent with Ross (2014), the study found that females and transgenders are rare in managing positions in the media. Like the studies of Morahan-Martin, (1998) Fuller, (2004) and Allan (2005), the news decisions and the news culture in Kerala may depict men’s perspectives in the field of journalism as it is male-dominated. Along with Gao & Martin-Kratzer (2011) women representation, in some special beats i.e. areas/topics, is either restricted or rare.

Total number of journalists in Kerala is 3,104 as per the PRD directory, 2014. Approximately, there is one journalist per ten thousand people in the state. As per results of Census 2011 published by The Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India, the sex ratio of the state of Kerala is 1084. In this context, gender perspective of journalistic characteristics in Kerala ought not to be masculine. Further, the population and its perspectives assume a feminine orientation by nature. But women representation in the field of journalism in Kerala is restricted to nearly one tenth (9.3%).

Transgenders are few (N=8) in the field of journalism in Kerala. It is estimated that there are at least 25,000 transgender persons in Kerala, the first Indian state that envisaged a Transgender policy (The Indian Express, 2016, July 8). In that respect, transgender journalists got represented more when general population-journalist proportion of 10000:1 in the state is taken into account.

Lower representation of women in the field of journalism is not peculiar to Kerala as the same is reported from a number of countries including both developed and developing nations by researchers over time (Fuller, 2004; Allan, 2005; Gallagher, 2011; Gao & Martin-Kratzer, 2011).

The more the media is new the more will be the women representation in media. Present study revealed that there is significant women representation in online media than that of traditional media. Socio-cultural dimensions must have played important role in this regard and media continue to be the mirror of society in every possible way. However, it is expected that if the trend of increasing representation of gender minorities in the online is continued, it will outnumber the traditional media very soon when the boom of online media in the state is taken into consideration.

VI.1 Gender and Personal Characteristics

Journalism in Kerala is male-dominated along with almost all the nations around the world (Chambers, D., Steiner, L., & Fleming, C, 2004). Female representation in the field is just one tenth. Online media tend to accommodate female journalists comparatively well. Younger female generation is more likely to enter the field of journalism along with other traditionally male dominated professions. As a result, females and transgenders are younger than their male counterparts in the field.

Journalists, in general, tend to get married except transgenders. Transgenders are either remained unmarried or became separated if got married. This may be due to the social situation and pressure that prevail in Kerala society. At the same time, married female journalists were less likely to have children when compared with their male counterparts. Again, only male journalists, though one in fourth in number, are having unemployed or economically dependent partners. These findings finger at the socio-cultural role expectations that woman has to discharge in a developing society like Kerala as what Donovan (1994) observed about American society. Majority of Kerala journalists come from a middle class family background.

Journalists, by the very nature of their work, are supposed to be either extrovert or both extrovert and introvert. Majority of the Kerala journalists, especially transgender journalists assessed themselves as having both introvert and extrovert personality. Both characteristics are equally important for journalists who are engaged in a profession where they mingle with society and find time to stay alone to organize the material gathered.

People in Kerala are highly political and religious and journalists are not an exception. Despite of gender, they are politically affiliated with one political front or the other. They also recognized themselves with
one religion or the other. Yet there are a remarkable number of apolitical as well as non-religious journalists in Kerala.

Hard work, strain and pressure that a journalist supposed to have in the profession may account for some occupational diseases like back pain, blood pressure etc. Journalists in Kerala also report to have the same and transgender journalists are having more such diseases than that of female and male journalists. Both physical and psychological factors, in relation with respective gender, might have contributed to this variation.

VI.2 Gender and Professional Characteristics

Transgender and female journalists seem to have better education, especially media education, than males. Late entry of these genders to the journalism field and aged male journalists who had less opportunity to have media education might be the reason for this observation. Journalists, mainly transgenders, were hesitated to reveal their organizational identity. They tend to fear the aftereffect of such a revelation has on their career and future. The fact that female journalists are less likely to leave an institution when compared with male and other gender folks should be observed in this respect. Gender specific professions or works in a profession is not a new finding. Females when compared to other genders tend more to be a reporter. There is little chance for females and no chance for transgenders to take a position in the management. Further, females seem to be the laggards when the area of photo/videoography is taken into account.

Undoubtedly, male journalists are more experienced and half of the transgenders and simple majority of females are having less than five years of experience in the field of journalism. Late entry and less experience also play vital role in rejecting the minority genders a position in the managing department. Also, the male journalists are more likely to get promotion when experience is measured as part of efficiency.

Employee organizations in the field of journalism are dominated and controlled by the male folk. As a result, male journalist is more likely to be a member in a journalistic organization than that of a female or a transgender. In opposition to Florida as reported by Everbach (2006) journalism in Kerala is not fully converted into a female/transgender friendly profession.

Though the earlier studies reported that male journalists are mostly given the special beats, the present study does not conform to it. Kerala journalists are equally given special beats despite their gender. Additionally, other gender seems to be the journalists more entrusted with special beats. Still, males have got a slight upper hand over females in terms of special beats.

In an era of digitization, globalization and murdochization, journalists of older generation may find some difficulty to catch up with younger generation’s philosophy and ideology. Also, penetration of a new gender may create some tensions in a historically male-dominated profession like journalism as remarked by Zoonen (1998). These all might have contributed to the finding that more than half of the journalists experience some kind of inequality in the field of journalism. And in the case of gender minorities in the field, the inequality experience is relatively high.

VII. CONCLUSION

Typically Kerala journalist is a young and married male with both introvert and extrovert personality and affiliated to one or other religion and political front. Journalists with such personal characteristics will certainly leave their marks on the product, i.e. media content they prepare. The media content will bear such marks as long as the trend continues. Majority of Kerala journalists are professionally qualified, working in the field and relatively experienced. They are members of any journalistic organization though not ready to reveal the organizational identity and tend not to leave the organization. And most of them experienced inequality one or other kind at their workplace. Change is inevitable and so is the trembling it leaves behind. Both journalism and journalists are in the phase of a drastic change in terms of technology and professional and personal characteristics. Journalism and journalists in Kerala are fast absorbing this reality when the trends among them are considered.

Present study is limited to the personal and professional variables of Kerala journalists with a gender perspective to predict the direction for which journalism of the land is heading. Survey to cover the attitude and aptitude of these journalists with regard to journalism and its evolving nature can be devised to gain more comprehensive view of the problem. Increasing representation of gender minorities – females and transgenders to the field and the resulting changes in the professional settings will remain important for long.
REFERENCES


