NETWORK OF WOMEN IN MEDIA, INDIA

5th Annual Meeting

Bangalore

9-11 February 2007

Spirit of the NWMI meeting!

Final Report
INTRODUCTION

The Network of Women in Media, India (NWMI) is a professional association linking women journalists and other women working in or on the media across the country. It came into being at a national meeting in Delhi in January 2002 after a process of network-building which began in 2000.

The regional meetings held in Bangalore (November 2000), Jaipur (March 2001) and Shillong (September 2001), which explored the need for and purpose of such a network, brought together female media professionals from a number of states working at various levels in a range of media in different languages as well as diverse fields within journalism. The idea of a countrywide network was enthusiastically and almost unanimously endorsed by participants at both the regional and the national workshops. Local networks were established in several places before the launch of the national one.

Both the national and the local media women’s networks aim to fulfil multiple objectives, both professional and societal. Apart from their obvious function as a forum for addressing issues related to the media as a workplace, they facilitate career advancement through the sharing of information and resources and mentoring. Training and professional enrichment programmes are also on the cards. In addition, they help highlight important issues relating to media standards and ethics, as well as the vital role of the media in society, especially in a developing, democratic and pluralistic country like India.

The NWMI is a voluntary, informal, non-hierarchical, participatory collective that has no institutional affiliation, infrastructure or paid staff. It is almost entirely dependent on members’ contributions of time, energy and money (the latter in the form of modest annual subscription fees, hitherto introduced only by some local networks to meet local needs).

Local networks affiliated to the NWMI are autonomous and free to evolve their own identities, structures and modes of functioning, as well as their own priorities and programmes. At the same time, through their informal association with the national network, members have the benefit of being connected to a larger community of colleagues across the country and having the opportunity to gain strength from each other, learn from each other’s experiences and, above, all enjoy interactions at the professional and personal levels. An e-group facilitating communication at the national level has been successfully functioning since 2005.
The NWMI website (www.nwmindia.org), launched in February 2003, has evolved into an interesting, useful and effective forum that seeks to promote both professional and personal enrichment. It has received enthusiastic response from women journalists and media-watchers, including many from outside the country. Several other media and women’s websites have provided links to the NWMI site, and postings on the site have been further disseminated through other media.

More importantly, members of the NWMI and others, including media practitioners, students and researchers in India and overseas, have benefited from the website in many ways. Feedback received at meetings, as well as through e-mails and postings on the site, have revealed that it has become an increasingly useful source of information concerning media and gender related news and analysis, as well as professional opportunities ranging from jobs to training. Women journalists (and, presumably, others) based outside the main metropolises, who had little access to such resources in the past, are now able to make use of announcements on the site about scholarships and fellowships, competitions and awards, workshops and conferences, and a number of other opportunities. The site has also enabled the dissemination of news concerning women journalists, including awards received, honours bestowed, and books launched, and so on, adding to the sense of belonging and community. (Unfortunately, the website has been stagnating for a few months now, chiefly due to lack of funds, which makes it difficult to keep it updated.)

To sum up, the networks – at the national and local levels -- came into being to meet a felt need among women in the media. Over time they have generated a growing, spreading, comforting and empowering sense of belonging to a larger community of media women who care about each other, about professionalism and ethics in the media, and about gender and other important issues relating to human rights, democracy and development.

ANNUAL MEETINGS

The periodic national-level meetings of the NWMI have, since 2004, become an eagerly anticipated annual feature of network activity. They constitute the only regular opportunity for media women from across the country to meet, get to know each other, and discuss issues of common interest and concern. The multiple purposes of these annual get-togethers include:
a) Providing a forum for media women from across the country to interact, build relationships/contacts and exchange information, experiences and views relating to the profession and society.

b) Enhancing the knowledge base and understanding of women in media on a wide range of current events and issues, including gender and other social issues, with a view to improving media coverage of them and/or making them more aware of developments in the media environment so that they are better equipped to deal with it in a constructive manner.

c) Strengthening the network and giving it direction so that it can play a proactive role in the effort to ensure that the media continue to function as the Fourth Estate and fulfils its vital role in the promotion of democracy and justice.

These meetings are typically held in different cities every year, hosted by the local network there. The agenda of each meeting is put together by the local organisers in consultation with the entire network. While designing the programme, the aim has been to make the experience both personally fulfilling and professionally rewarding.

The annual meetings serve as important platforms for the continuing education and concretisation of women in the media. Special efforts are made to ensure that each meeting provides an opportunity for participants to (a) analyse media coverage of a wide range of events and issues and to figure out ways of ensuring that vital issues confronting society are highlighted in the media in a holistic manner, and (b) become aware of macro developments in the media which have the potential to impact media content in multiple, not always positive, ways. The hope and expectation is that these meetings contribute in various ways towards safeguarding and strengthening the role of the Fourth Estate in a democracy.

PREVIOUS MEETINGS

As the reports on past meetings on the NWMI website mention, they have addressed a wide range of socially relevant issues. At the first national meeting in Delhi in January 2002 (http://www.nwmindia.org/About_us/workshop.htm), during which the NWMI was established, the following topics were addressed in keynote addresses and panel discussions:

- The Media and the Right to Information (Speaker: Aruna Roy)
- The Media and Education (Speaker: Krishna Kumar)
- Globalisation, gender and the media (Speaker: Subhashini Saigal)
- Militarisation, gender and the media (Speaker: Anuradha Chenoy)
- Communalisation, gender and the media (Speaker: Tanika Sarkar)
- Women Covering Conflict (Speakers: Women Journalists)
- Gender and Media: Global Perspective (Speaker: Margaret Gallagher)
Besides internal discussions on a wide range of issues, the meeting included a screening of the documentary film, *Hashiye Par Zindagi* (Life on the Margin). Produced by the Violence Mitigation and Amelioration Project and directed by Arun Kumar, the film focussed on the widows of political massacres in Bihar.

During the 2nd national meeting in Mumbai in January 2004 (http://www.nwmindia.org/About_us/Centres/nwmi_second_national_meetjan04.htm), on the eve of the World Social Forum (which held out the hope that “Another World is Possible”), the major theme addressed was “Another Journalism is Possible.” Participants discussed recent, regrettable changes in the priorities and preoccupations of the media and possible ways of ensuring that development-related issues, including gender, continue to find a place in the media. Another topic of discussion in Mumbai was sexual harassment in the workplace, following up on the Supreme Court’s landmark judgement on the subject in the Vishaka case. The contentious issue had been put on the agenda of the network, and therefore of the meeting, by a number of cases involving media workplaces that had been reported from different parts of the country over the past year or more. Participants also discussed what could be done about the apparent erosion of ethics and standards in media practice. The experiences of the institutional ill-treatment of journalists within a particular media house and of reporting in a communally charged environment like Gujarat were also discussed.

Dr. Carolyn M. Byerly, a visiting media academic from the University of Maryland (USA), who was in India doing research for a book on women's media activism, gave a talk on Women and Media Conglomeration. There was also an optional session for NWMI members on the eve of the WSF: a special press briefing for women journalists by participants in a two-day pre-WSF international event called, "Building Solidarities: Feminist Dialogues."

The 3rd national meeting held in Hyderabad in January 2005 (http://www.nwmindia.org/About_us/Centres/Hyderabad/nwm_meet_report.htm) received welcome support from local media organizations, as a result of which a number of women journalists working in districts across the state were able to participate in it. Also among the participants were rural reporters working with Navodayam,
a magazine initiated by an anti-poverty programme and staffed mainly by poor, dalit women in Chittoor district, Andhra Pradesh, whose enthusiasm and rich experience inspired their urban colleagues. A field trip to Pastapur (Medak district, AP) to interact with rural women working in community radio and video, as well as on food security through cooperative seed and grain banks and organic farming, also served as an eye-opener.

Among the issues discussed in Hyderabad were: media monitoring and activism, participation of women from Dalit and Muslim communities in the media, the situation of women working in the electronic and regional language media, compliance (or otherwise) of media houses with the Supreme Court’s guidelines on sexual harassment at the workplace, and official policies and programmes to eliminate sex selection.

The 4th national meeting, held in Kolkata in February 2006 (http://www.nwmindia.org/About_us/Centres/bengal/fourth_natl_conf_report.htm), opened with the screening of the controversial documentary film, "A Day In the Life of a Hangman," directed by Joshy Joseph and focussing on the media circus that made a hero as well as a victim of Nata Mullick, the man who was to hang rape convict Dhananjoy Chatterjee in the city in 2004.

A well-attended public meeting on the first day of the meeting featured a panel discussion on the topic, “Media, war and conflict: Will the media in South Asia give peace a chance?” The panelists from four countries in the region were Rehana Hakim, editor, Newsline, Pakistan; Sharmini Boyle, producer-director, Young Asia Television (YA TV), Sri Lanka; Sumi Khan, senior reporter, Daily Samakal, Bangladesh; and Urvashi Butalia, publisher-editor, Zubaan Books.

A special event during the meeting in Kolkata involved the felicitation of Vidya Munshi, the first woman journalist in the city, who set the tone for what later came to be termed investigative journalism. Vidyadi’s talk gave participants a peek into a bygone era of journalism as well as the causes that she wrote about. A talk by historian Janaki Nair provided participants with uncommon insights into “Gender and politics.” Among the other topics discussed at the meeting were: “Why gender is not a niche issue” and “Gender and censorship” – the session on the taking the form of an adda (informal get-together) with well-known creative women based in Kolkata such as artist Shyamashree Basu, writer Nabaneeta Deb Sen and film-maker Vasudha Joshi. The presence and participation of women in the media in Bengal/Kolkata, the problems of freelance journalists, issues concerning media fellowships, etc., were also discussed.
2007 MEETING

The 5th annual meeting, organised by the Network of Women in Media, Bangalore (NWMB), was held in the capital of Karnataka from 9 to 11 February 2007 (for preliminary report see http://www.nwmindia.org/About_us/Centres/Bangalore/detailed_report_wnm_meet_2007.htm#Day1).

The agenda for the meeting (attached) attempted to reflect the multiple interests, concerns and needs of the varied membership of the network, which includes women of varying ages and social/cultural/linguistic/religious backgrounds working at different levels in a wide range of media, in both English and other Indian languages. Like the programmes of all NWMI national meetings this, too, was drafted and finalised on the basis of inputs and feedback from members across the country.

Nearly 100 women journalists from nine states (Andhra Pradesh, Delhi, Gujarat, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Manipur, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal) participated in the NWMI meet – all but one of the out of town participants paying their own way to Bangalore. Among them were 20 women involved in community media – print, radio and video – in Andhra Pradesh (Pastapur and Chittoor). In addition, there were four South Asian journalist participants (from the Maldives, Pakistan and Sri Lanka), who also bore the cost of their own travel. Ten media students from a journalism institute in Bangalore and two international observers from outside the region also attended the meeting.

The main venue for the meeting was Vidyadeep College, a centrally located educational institution offering basic facilities at very reasonable cost.

The public meeting on the evening of the first day and a film-screening session before that were held at another educational institution, the all-women Mount Carmel College, which agreed to co-host of the public meeting and provided space free of cost. Expenses on the entire meeting were kept to a minimum in keeping with the ethos of the NWMI. A special fund-raising drive to raise the required funds focussed primarily on contributions – in cash or kind -- from individuals and institutions based in Bangalore with the twin objectives of drawing on local resources and making the NWMB/NWMI more widely known in the city.
Day 1 - Friday, 9 February 2007

The first session on the first day of the three-day meeting was an informal, interactive one in which participants were welcomed by representatives of the NWMB and then had a chance to introduce themselves to each other. Some had already met on earlier occasions but quite a few were meeting for the first time. After an early lunch the group left for Mt. Carmel College in two buses.

Film screening

The afternoon session of the first day was devoted to viewing and discussing documentary films made by Bangalore-based film-makers on issues connected to the city in different ways.

The first part of the session featured excerpts from two films (*July Boys* and *The ‘M’ Way*) directed by Gautam Sonti and Carol Upadhya from the “Coding Culture” series focusing on the software industry based in Bangalore -- widely known as India’s Silicon Plateau (see [http://www.iisc.ernet.in/nias/codingculture.htm](http://www.iisc.ernet.in/nias/codingculture.htm) for details).

As the directors explained, as ethnographic films, these documentaries did not set out to make a particular point or advance a specific argument. Based on the fact that the Indian software industry has emerged as a key node of the global capitalist economy and that Indian software engineers are now a significant category of global ‘knowledge workers,’ the films take a close look at the software industry as it exists -- especially in terms of its work culture -- and at the people who work within it. According to Sonti, however, the relative absence of woman-power in the companies shown in the two films screened is obvious. “While one does have women -- but not in responsible positions, the second has no women at all,” he pointed out.

In the second part of the session participants viewed *Suttaru Solloppadavaru* (*Burnt not destroyed*), a film on the alarming and apparently growing phenomenon of acid attacks against women, directed by Sanjana C.B. and Usha B.N. The film highlights the physical, psychological, social and economic impact of these crimes on victims/survivors and their families. It also explores the social context within which violence against women in general, and acid attacks in particular, thrive -- including the increasing levels of violence in cinema. The film discusses ongoing efforts to tackle the problem – at the individual, social and legal levels – led by the Campaign and Struggle Against Acid Attacks on Women (CSAAAW), a coalition of organisations and individuals across Karnataka, that has been working on the issue for several years.

Sanjana, a founder member of CSAAAW in addition to being part of the NWMB, responded to questions and spoke about the problems caused by lack of public and official awareness and sensitivity to such violence, the absence of appropriate responses
and systems from the medical profession, and the governmental action required to tackle this particular form of violence, including regulation to curb the easy availability of the dangerous acids used in such attacks. The necessary role of the media in focussing attention on the various aspects of the crime and the campaign against it was discussed in some detail.

**Public Meeting**

A public meeting was held at Mt. Carmel College the same evening to mark the first day of the NWMI meeting. This occasion was without doubt the highlight of the three-day event and it drew a large, diverse audience from the city. A major attraction was, of course, the presence of Gloria Steinem, the internationally renowned American feminist journalist and author, as the chief guest and keynote speaker. But the launch of the Anupama Jayaraman Memorial Award for Young Women Journalists, presented to the winner, Smita Aggarwal, by well-known women’s rights activist Ruth Manorama (recipient of the Right Livelihood Award in 2006) contributed equally to making the event meaningful.

**Anupama Jayaraman Memorial Award**

The Anupama Jayaraman Memorial Award was instituted by the Jayaraman family in memory of the young and promising Bangalore-based journalist with a special interest in human rights and social justice, who passed away in January 2006. The award is one of several efforts undertaken by her family to keep her concerns and ideas alive. It is meant to encourage and honour young women journalists who, like her, believe in meaningful journalism and have the courage and determination to write on issues relating to human rights and social justice. The award includes a citation and a cheque for Rs. 15,000.

The Network of Women in Media, Bangalore, collaborated with her family in setting up and operationalising the new, national media award, the first to focus on the work of young women in the early years of their careers as journalists. The NWMB will
continue to cooperate with the Jayaraman family in sustaining the award, which will be presented at the NWMI’s annual meetings held in different parts of the country every year.

The 2007 award called for nominations/entries from female print journalists living anywhere in India and writing in English. Awards for journalism in other languages may be introduced in the future. The theme of the Award for this inaugural year was 'Human Rights and Gender Issues.'

Pune-based Smita Aggarwal was selected as the first winner of the award from among a number of nominations that came in from across the country. The winner was selected by a five-member jury comprising Mr R Shankar, Editor, The New Indian Express; Ms Poornima Rao, Editor, Udayavani; Ms Shakuntala Narasimhan, columnist, consumer activist and musician; Mr Suresh Menon, noted sports writer and columnist; and Ms Ranita Hirji, Dean of Studies, COMMITS.

Smita, who has reported on women in the CRPF in Kashmir, found favour with the jury because of the "quality of inputs that have obviously gone into some of the stories she has submitted." According to one jury member, she had “gone that extra distance to put herself in the shoes of the women who serve under difficult conditions but have not received adequate media coverage."

**Speech by Ruth Manorama**

Ruth Manorama, a tireless Bangalore-based activist working mainly among the urban poor and dalits, gave away the new media award. In her address to the gathering Ruth highlighted several home truths about the media in her characteristic, inimitable style, which drew appreciative responses from the audience. While acknowledging the media’s service to society, she underlined the importance of reporting the truth and nothing but the truth because “only the truth shall set us free.”

Referring to media coverage of issues concerning the urban poor, who constitute a sizeable proportion of the country’s population, she pointed out that while events like slum demolitions do sometimes capture the imagination of the media, and little attention is paid to the multiple, valid, often preventable reasons that drive poor people from rural areas into urban slums or to the many ongoing efforts to secure justice for them.

On the question of caste and the media, she pointed out that it was important to pay
serious attention to the scarce presence and skewed representation of dalits in the media. She described the marginalisation of Dr. Babasaheb R. Ambedkar, the main architect of the Constitution of India, during the early post-independence period and drew attention to the way Kanshi Ram, founder of the Bahujan Samaj Party, was written off as a casteist leader whose death in 2006 did not merit front page coverage in some leading newspapers.

She also made light references to media responses to the news that she had been conferred with what is often known as the alternative Nobel Prize, pointing out that the Kannada media paid far more attention to it than the English media. According to her, despite the fact that friends in national television channels often call her for brief comments on various current events and issues, none of the channels interviewed her in any depth after she received the award: “Maybe my colour is not suitable for TV,” she said – only partly in jest.

In conclusion she called for more diversity in the media so that it becomes accessible to dalits, adivasis and minority communities and thereby truly represents Indian society. She ended by challenging the NWMI to help break stereotypes and thereby contribute to the struggle towards a “casteless, classless and gender-equal society.”

Keynote address by Gloria Steinem

The thought-provoking, applause-producing and laughter-generating keynote address by veteran feminist writer and activist Gloria Steinem covered a vast canvas. “The Current Campfire,” the title of her talk, refers to the long tradition of people gathering around campfires to sing and dance, and to share stories and information.

Describing the media as “the current campfire” she said the question of whether human beings become “empathetic, peaceful and supportive of each other’s welfare or narcissistic, dominant and convinced that life is a zero sum game” depends to a large extent on “the kinds of campfires we, our families and our communities grow up with.” In many cultures most women and certain groups of men were relegated to the task of keeping the fire going and restrained from telling their stories at the campfire. However, thanks to women and supportive men in the media, the circle of those who speak has slowly been enlarged and this has changed what is being learnt by everyone.
“We are also beginning to learn that we have a collective human history in which everyone sat around the fire and everyone was heard, when we told news and sang, and our voices were valued for their usefulness to the whole group – not just the group into which we were born,” she said.

According to her, it is important to recall the 95 per cent of human history that predates patriarchy, which has been in existence over the past five to eight thousand years, so that it is clear that things have not always been this way and need not always be this way. We are finally beginning to understand that there were other forms of human organisation during 95 per cent of human history, she said, pointing out that knowledge about these “original cultures” is important not only to the female half of the human race but also to the races and classes of males who were also suppressed and made to serve the so-called superior groups.

“I want to excite your curiosity about thinking of the whole span of human history instead of just 5000 years or so and to understand that patriarchy and monotheism are very new,” she said. “In fact, perhaps we should tonight declare the past 5000 years of patriarchy, political forms of religion... and nationalism as an experiment that failed. And declare this as the first meeting of the post-patriarchal, post-monotheistic, post-nationalistic age!”

Returning to the concept of the media as “the current campfire,” she reiterated the fact that women and “wrong” groups of men have been keeping the fire going but prevented from speaking around it. Pointing out that a society that is deprived of a large part – indeed more than half -- of its wisdom is going to be in trouble, she said: “We are now in big trouble.”

Describing the status of women and coverage of events and issues in the US media, she said the gendered view of the world which has led to the division of news into “hard” and “soft” can be seen in the way Oprah, “arguably the most influential media person in the US,” is condescended to by “serious voices” in the media who “talk with sorrow about the Oprah-fication of the news.” According to her, by that they just mean that she is discussing most of human experience and that she dares to use narrative – not just generalisations, not just figures, not just two opposite poles fighting over an issue: “She dares to take seriously the subjects that affect most of our lives.”
She also highlighted the many important stories that remain unreported or incompletely covered by the media because of this partial view of the world. She called upon the media to recognise that there are not just two sides to every question, that everything is not about winners and losers that it is important to focus on solutions as much as problems and that narratives are just as relevant – if not more – than statistics and analysis even while tackling serious issues.

“Altogether, as you can see, we have a big job in gathering the whole human family around our various media campfires, with voices that are not prejudged, not excluded, with all ears open and with everybody tending the fire – not just a particular set of groups,” she said. “We are not doing this only because of the great talent in this room; we are not doing it only because of the female half of the human population, we are not doing it only to free and allow the full circle of human qualities to be accessible to men as well as women, we are doing it to save this fragile spaceship earth that we love so much.”

**Day 2 – Saturday, 10 February 2007**

Saturday morning saw participants benefiting from two sessions that were specially tailored to address health-related issues faced by professional women in general and journalists in particular: one through yoga (led by Vishalakshi of the Atmadarshan Yogashram, affiliated to the Bihar School of Yoga) and the other through an interactive session on nutrition for women on the go (by Sheela Krishnaswamy of Niche4Nutrition, a nutrition consultancy firm).

**Panel Discussion**

**The Media, IT/ITES/ICTs and Gender**

The first working session of the day was a panel discussion, chaired by senior journalist and NWMI member, Kalpana Sharma, on “The Media, IT/ITES/ICTs and Gender.” The topic was picked in view of the close association between Bangalore and the Information Technology (IT) and IT-Enabled Services (ITES) industry, the considerable coverage given by the media to the “new economy” companies based in the city and the fact that the question of women in these industries is often lost in the hype. Little attention is paid to the many, different gender-related aspects of this high-profile, high-performing sector except in connection with occasional, sensational crimes involving women employees. Even less attention is paid to the role of Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) in development and women’s empowerment at the grassroots. The session was
designed to bring these neglected areas together to improve understanding and coverage of an important sector of the Indian economy.

Social anthropologist Carol Upadhya, who has been researching various aspects of the software industry in Bangalore and its work culture as well as workforce, presented an overview of gender issues in the Indian software outsourcing industry. According to her, the high attrition levels and the difficulty of attracting well-qualified employees, have made software companies put in place employee-friendly Human Resources policies, which include gender neutral and even women-friendly policies. The industry is generally believed to provide a good avenue for the employment of women, who have conventionally not opted for technical occupations, with computer programming seen as a more attractive option for female graduate engineers than many ‘old economy’ jobs. As a result, a large number of women have entered this field and now constitute about one-fourth of the total workforce.

Yet, she says, while IT companies make strong claims about equality of opportunity, her study of the IT workforce has revealed that the objective conditions of work in the software industry present greater obstacles to women than men, and that official policies of gender neutrality often tend to obfuscate these gender issues. Her presentation explored some of the reasons for the little-known marginalisation of women in the software industry, and highlights the gap between the ideology of equal opportunity and the actuality of the gendering of software work. (For details see her paper, “Gender Issues in the Indian Software Outsourcing Industry” in the book, Gender in the Information Society: Emerging Issues, available online under a Creative Commons license at [http://www.apdip.net/publications/ict4d/GenderIS.pdf](http://www.apdip.net/publications/ict4d/GenderIS.pdf))

Psychologist Manika Ghosh, whose presentation was based on her experience of counselling employees in the ITES sector, provided a glimpse of the range of issues faced by female call centre workers. Among the factors contributing to work-related stress she cited work overload, schedules based on different time zones, adjustment to shift changes, the use of “global” pseudonyms, abusive clients, irregular meal times and unhealthy food, and safety concerns. Outlining the physical consequences, including medical problems, arising from the peculiar nature and patterns of work in this sector, she went into some detail on the gender-specific health issues that women employees face, particularly vis a vis reproductive health. She also highlighted the emerging social and psychological impact of the realities that mark this relatively new sector of labour. While acknowledging the steps taken by several employers to mitigate some of these problems, she suggested that much more needed to be done, especially in terms of raising awareness. (Unfortunately, the representatives of the Union for ITES Professionals –
Kavitha Kadambi, a successful software professional, spoke from her personal experience and observation of the role and impact of women in the IT industry over various stages of its development. She traced the growth of the female workforce from 1995, when she joined the industry and was one of five women in a 100-member unit, to the present situation, where women make up 25 per cent of the workforce. While acknowledging the imperatives of working in an industry based in India but dealing primarily with foreign clients – such as late night and early morning calls, international travel and overseas stay for varying durations – she focused on the positive aspects of these realities: for example, breaking established stereotypes about Indian women in other parts of the world.

She also mentioned the growing focus on “inclusivity” and “diversity” within the industry, which brought in its wake better facilities at work, especially for women. However, she acknowledged that acceptance of women in senior line roles continues to be a challenge. At the same time, she said, possibly in response to global trends, several Indian IT organizations are striving to foster environments where women can be extremely successful. She clearly saw considerable potential for infusing such concepts into such a young industry.

Anita Gurumurthy, founding member and executive director of IT for Change, which working in the area of ICTs for development, shifted the discussion to another plane, speaking of the need to look beyond the IT/ITES industries in order to appreciate the potential of information and communication technologies for women’s empowerment, especially at the grassroots. While digital technologies are reconstituting social arrangements, transforming social relationships and institutions, she said, it is important to critically assess the dominant frameworks of technology diffusion, which evolved to strengthen older ideologies of exploitation. According to her, the opportunity for women lay in the flip side: these technologies can also constitute the new building blocks for new structural frameworks of society and provide a potential basis for more democratic and socially-just arrangements.

She cited the example of Mahiti Manthana (MM), a pilot project seeking to adapt ICTs as a tool for women’s empowerment and associated social change. IT for Change has partnered with Mahila Samakhya (MS), a government-initiated programme of education for women’s empowerment, in this project, which uses radio, video and telecentres to strengthen the information and communication processes of the rural women’s self-help
groups (SHGs) that form the basis of the MS strategy, as well as the federations that they have formed.

Mahiti Manthana currently uses radio in a design that combines elements of both community and campus radio formats. Community-led radio initiatives allow women to use media for telling their own stories, to assert their perspectives and for peer to peer communication. The campus radio format, on the other hand, provides both a pedagogic tool as well as an organisation building space. The project seeks to enable poor, often illiterate women from the SHGs to use radio in creative ways for perspective building, for sharing educational and development content, and as an organisational platform that links MS membership across various districts in the state.

The video component of MM is also tailored very specifically for a highly localised audience and made *for* women, although not necessarily always *by* women. The video strategy is basically inexpensive, relying by and large on such content that dovetails into the activity plans and immediate priorities of MS staff and SHG women. The video strategy aims for flexibility and versatility through one or more of many possible uses, including, for example; a stand-alone training tool, a medium of self-expression, a mechanism for identity building, a record of organisational history, a peer-to-peer communication vehicle, a lobbying platform for representing issues to government officials.

MM is also in the process of setting up telecentres with computers that are not only community-owned but owned by women. The telecentres, referred to as Namma Mahiti Kendra (NMK) are run by adolescent girls (kishoris), who form an important constituency within MS, under the ownership and control of the local SHG. Women’s ownership of the village telecentre is viewed within the project as an empowerment strategy in itself. While the NMKs provide computer education and fee-based services, their potential for real empowerment lies in the linkages they are able to make with public institutions in order to obtain due entitlements. Accordingly, the NMKs not only provide basic information about government services and schemes but also facilitate women’s access to official information using the Right to Information (RTI) legislation. Thus, while the telecentre kishori collects community data and helps public service providers to use this data to target interventions (such as health interventions for pregnant women and infants), she is also able to establish accountability for services not provided by matching data concerning actual delivery of healthcare services with claims made in
public records obtained through the use of RTI. (For more details see http://itforchange.net/mambo/content/view/123/1/, http://itforchange.net/mambo/content/view/99/55/, http://itforchange.net/mambo/content/view/127/1/)

Voices from the region

*The media and the war in Sri Lanka*

In the next session, visiting Sri Lankan journalists Dilrukshi Handunnetti (Editor-Investigations and Political Correspondent, *The Sunday Leader*, Colombo) and Seetha Ranjani (senior journalist and member of the Free Media Movement) spoke about the long-standing and now escalating conflict in the island nation and media coverage of it both within the country and in neighbouring India.

Dilrukshi provided background information on the conflict and presented the findings of an informal, ad hoc survey of Indian print and television media from 2000 to 2006 done by three journalists. The review revealed that the image of Sri Lanka in the Indian media can be broadly classified into two categories: an exotic land with an ancient history or a war-torn neighbour. The scanty and sporadic reports on the Sri Lankan conflict in the Indian media remain largely event-based, focussing primarily on the fighting – details of bombings, casualties, capture of territory, etc. -- and, to some extent, on the number of displaced people or refugees. The event-driven reporting lacked depth and there was little discussion, let alone analysis, of the many issues involved. (For more details see text at http://www.nwmindia.org/resources/research/dilrukh_paper_presntation_sri_lanka.htm)

Seetha’s presentation focussed on her work documenting the lives and experiences of the nearly 38,000 war widows in Sri Lanka belonging to different communities, including widows of both the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the Sri Lankan armed forces.

There were two parallel sessions in the afternoon – one exploring issues faced by women in regional language media with special focus on Kannada media, and the other on the experiences of rural women working in community media.
Panel Discussion

*Women in Kannada media: Surviving in times of globalisation*

This session had Dr. Vijaya (veteran journalist, editor, film critic, playwright, and activist) in the chair and R. Poornima, editor of *Udayavani* (the first woman editor of a mainstream daily newspaper in Kannada), in the role of moderator. Nagamani S. Rao, the first woman in Karnataka to get official accreditation as a journalist, who began her career in print media but later joined the news division of All India Radio, was also on the panel. Among the other speakers were Gayatri Devi (the first woman editor of the Sunday supplement of *Prajavani* and currently the most senior working woman journalist in Kannada), C.G. Manjula (Assistant Editor, *Sudha*), and Champavathi (novelist, activist and editorial collective member of *Manasa*, a feminist “little magazine”).

The session began with an audio-visual presentation providing an overview of Women and Kannada Media by Prathibha Nandakumar, poet and journalist currently working with *Deccan Herald*, and an NWMB member. She traced the history of Kannada journalism and, especially, of women’s involvement in Kannada media from the early years of the 20th Century onwards. She told inspiring stories of pioneering women like Nanjangud Tirumalamba and R. Kalyanamma, both child widows who defied convention to write as well as to start and edit publications (with special focus on the need for women’s emancipation), in addition to doing social work and participating in public life.

After Mysore University introduced journalism at the degree level in 1953, several girls opted for the subject. Nagamani Rao, the first woman to score top rank in journalism, was also one of the first to get a job as a full-time employee in the mainstream media when she was appointed a sub-editor in *Janavani* in 1957. By the 1960s several women were involved in writing, editing, and publishing magazines and newspapers. However, women were not yet “mainstreamed” into daily newspapers, possibly because the long hours and irregular timings of the news business were not considered suitable for them.
According to Prathibha, even today mainstream Kannada media is male-oriented, catering to men’s needs more than women’s on the basis of the fact that men decide which paper to buy. “Even as we are boasting about having a woman editor,” she said, “she is expected to perform like a ‘man’ to show good results in the market.”

Of course, since women are ‘saleable’ commodities, she said, Kannada media are also aping English media by publishing photographs of women wearing ‘high fashion’ clothes, and so on. In her view, women’s magazines in Kannada continue to propagate the stereotypical woman but in increasingly new ‘avatars’ -- the ‘lifestyle’ journalism initiated by English media has ‘trickled down’ to Kannada media as well.

The introduction of women’s supplements in Kannada newspapers was considered a major development. However, men are in charge of them in all the papers and the articles published in them concentrate on instructing women on how to be better wives, mothers and daughters-in-law. Serious issues are occasionally discussed but this is not the main thrust of these publications. Also, since everything is done with an eye on commercial success, even serious issues are dealt with in a ‘popular’ manner.

Prathibha also affirmed that there are no women political or sports reporters, and not many news photographers, within the Kannada media, and that women are still, by and large, expected to cover ‘soft’ stories.

She went on to highlight another problem arising from the fact that the craze for English education has over-shadowed education in the mother tongue. As a result, she said, in one generation Kannada has gone out of the “market,” and there is a serious shortage of young women who can express themselves in Kannada. In any case, most aspiring journalists in the state tend to turn to the English media in search of better employment opportunities.

This theme was taken up by C.G. Manjula, who spoke on “The struggle for identity.” According to her, although Kannada, the official language of Karnataka, is an ancient language with a rich heritage of over 2000 years, and despite the fact that creative works
of immense importance are constantly being produced in the language, Kannada is losing
ground to English and Hindi in the state. She cited a recent development in which an
entire Kannada newspaper was being produced as a translation of an English newspaper.
“Do we have to get a second hand translation of even daily happenings?” she asked.

The process of translation from English to Kannada is not even a century old, she said,
yet Kannada is already in danger of becoming an ‘Anuvada Bhasha’ – a language of
translation. She also spoke of how English has become a strong tool in the neo-colonial
world, with people going along with the common assumption that Kannada is not
equipped to enable them to acquire modern knowledge. She highlighted the fact that
language is increasingly being seen as a commodity, with Education, English and
Employment opportunities being interlinked. According to her, while multilingualism and,
indeed, pluralism in all domains is the way to preserve identity, at present Kannada media
reflects a mixed identity.

Speaking about gender issues in Kannada media Gayathri Devi shared her experiences of
working in the male-dominated world of journalism over 28 years. Since she was the
only woman on the copy desk she was assigned to edit all the reports sent by news
agencies with the slug ‘woman.’ Although she was interested in politics, it was assumed
that she would not be able to ‘handle’ political news. Not only was political coverage
out of bounds, but even other lead or front page stories were not given to her. She
was allowed to write and edit only stories meant for the inner pages. Slowly but surely,
after a long time and hard struggle, attitudes began to change, she said. The process
involved fighting with the system, with male colleagues, with family, and also, at the
same time, struggling to prove to herself that she could do it.

Finally, when an opportunity came her way to write on the elections, she grabbed it and
wrote election analysis. But she had to work doubly hard to ensure that it was accepted.
She mentioned that both she and Poornima had to go out of their way to get their poll
analyses to be accepted. Despite the discouragement received from male colleagues as
well as family, they persevered and thus paved the way for the next generation of women.
She highlighted the fact that several women journalists who had put in long years of
service were never given the top positions, citing in particular the example of
Vijayashree, who was denied the assistant editor’s post despite brilliant performance. At
the same time, she said, things have changed for the better now.
Champavathi made a brief presentation on alternative magazines and networking. Manasa is both an autonomous women’s group known for its fight for gender justice and a 20-year-old magazine. She explained how networking with other women’s groups within the state and in the rest of the country had helped them to survive and reach out without taking funds from the government or foreign organisations. She talked about the various special editions of Manasa, focussing on communalism, globalisation, war, developmental issues, personal laws, etc.

She also listed the many problems faced by little magazines, such as backlash emerging from mainstream media’s skewed and often negative portrayal of feminism and women’s movements. She particularly cited the examples of several teleserials which portray women characters in a stereotypical fashion. She also proposed that the ‘NGOisation’ of women’s movements has had a negative impact on alternative women’s magazines. According to her, there is a vacuum and stagnation in the cultural field since younger generation seem no longer interested in preserving their own culture but, instead, prefer to adopt modern, western ideologies and cultures.

Nagamani S. Rao’s talk about getting organized began with her experiences during the early days of her career: it was like stepping back into history to hear that they then used the ‘Morse Code’ to dispatch news! She was the lone female working journalist in Kannada for 15 years from the time she started out in journalism as a sub-editor in a daily newspaper through to her shift to radio. She went through several awkward, embarrassing and difficult situations but felt that it was all worthwhile since she was richly rewarded in the later stages of her working life.

According to her, when more women came on to the scene, especially in the English language media in Bangalore, they decided to get together. They established the Bangalore Media Women’s Forum as a group with a purpose that would provide them with a space where they could feel free to exchange ideas and share common experiences and problems. They decided to become members of the Press Club of Bangalore and used its premises for the regular meetings of the group.

Members of the forum felt there was a need for better coverage of news relating to women, especially in terms of follow up on atrocities on women. Wanting to do something to improve matters, they collaborated in ensuring coverage of women’s issues. The Tiptur dowry death case involving a woman called Shashikala was one of their
success stories: thanks to their efforts the press covered it extensively and the guilty were punished. The group also organised interactive sessions with and talks by visitors to the city. She said it was important to learn from past experiences. She also pointed out that present-day women journalists not only have the comfort of numbers, but are also privileged to have the benefit of modern facilities.

Dr Vijaya, who chaired the session, spoke in detail about the role of journalists in the current context during her presidential address. According to her, when she began to write in a different, serious manner people assumed that her pieces must have been written by a man. A lively question and answer session at the end led to interesting discussions.

**Session with rural media women**

A parallel session on Saturday afternoon featured print journalists involved in bringing out *Navodayam*, a magazine for rural women in Chittoor district, Andhra Pradesh, as well as the radio and video women of the Community Media Trust, Pastapur, AP.

The entire editorial team of *Navodayam* participated in the NWMI meeting, taking advantage of the fact that Bangalore is relatively close to Chittoor. K. Manjula, who functions as editor, talked about the experiences of the collective over the past six years. The publication is distributed free of cost in 65 mandals (talukas) of Chittoor District and its circulation is currently 10,000 copies. A dozen reporters write on events and issues concerning society religion, gender, health, and so on. “We are dedicated to sensitising women and see the magazine as a forum for rural Dalit women to raise their voices against any difficulties they face.” According to her, the interactive platform that *Navodayam* has provided has helped team members to become better journalists and also to progress both socially and financially. They have found that covering news and writing on issues is in itself empowering and liberating.

A. Bharathi, who looks after circulation, pointed out that while a large number of women were given the training for working on *Navodayam*, only 12 women managed to survive as reporters. The rest could not stay on in the job. According to her, women in their area tend not to leave their homes, and are hardly likely to be allowed to go all over the place
for reporting. “We had to overcome a lot of fear.” She said. “And even now we face quite a lot of opposition from men in our Dalit community, and get very little support.” Acknowledging that they have learnt to interact with big officials in the process of reporting, she admitted that there is still a social hierarchy which makes Dalit women reporters sit on the floor when they go to meet officials. However, she is confident that such things will change and that they will ultimately triumph.

According to V. Mallika, one of the reporters, although the government had started the poverty alleviation project under which Navodayam was launched, it is their team’s enthusiasm and persistence that has sustained the magazine. They gather all the information, write reports, edit their own stories, design pages, print, publish and distribute their own community magazine with little help from anywhere or anyone. She regretted the fact that the Andhra Pradesh Union of Working Journalists (APWJ) has been denying membership to Navodayam reporters even though the newsletter is actually an independent initiative of Dalit women with minimal government sponsorship. The publication caters to women, airing their problems, discussing the importance of literacy, etc. “We have also received death threats from various people for covering and writing about issues that directly deal with local women,” she said. According to Manjula, although the magazine has published articles on the new legislation to deal with domestic violence, they would like further information about the Act, and about how and where women facing domestic violence can go for help.

Two members of the Navodayam team, who have received training in videography and video documentation, have made a documentary film on child marriage. This has been shown to villagers in order to create awareness amongst them about the illegal and harmful practice. They have started another group initiative, using cartoons to reach out to illiterate people even though none of them have had any kind training in cartooning. They had brought a mini-exhibition of their cartoons to the meeting.

The legislation on community radio passed in late 2006 formed the background of the second half of the session, devoted to the women of the DDS Community Media Trust based in Pastapur, AP, represented by six members at the NWMI meet (who took turns wielding the camera throughout the three days). Their radio initiative is one of the oldest
experiments in community radio in the country. Two short films providing a quick glimpse of their work in both community radio and video -- *The Sangham Shot* and *A Radio of Their Own* -- were screened before the women took the floor.

Three young dalit women who run the community radio station in Machnoor village, near Pastapur. The facility was set up in 1999 in response to the demand for a radio of their own from poor, dalit, non-literate women who felt the need for a medium of communication that would enable them to share information and ideas with other members of their rural communities. These women are among the over 5000 from 75 villages in and around Pastapur who belong to sanghams (collectives) facilitated by the Deccan Development Society (DDS), a 20-year-old grassroots rural development organisation (for more details see www.ddsindia.com).

The station seeks to serve the information, education, and cultural needs of the local population. The programmes revolve around issues relevant to agriculture in semi-arid areas, literacy and education, public health and hygiene, environmental and ecological issues, bio-diversity and food security, indigenous knowledge systems, gender justice, and local cultures, with a special focus on song and drama. The fully equipped, low cost radio station has a 100-watt transmitter with a reach of approximately 30 kilometres. In the absence of a licence to broadcast, they had to “narrow-cast” by sending audio-cassettes to villages, where people sat around simple “two-in-ones,” listening to the programmes and discussing the subjects covered in them. However, those days may soon be over in view of the new legislation.

The farmer-filmmakers of Pastapur have not only been the subjects of two documentaries (“The Sangham Shot” and “Ten Women and a Camera”), but they have themselves made a number of films, some on commission. For one of these, “Why are Warangal Farmers Angry with BT Cotton?” the women travelled to the area several times to record the experiences and opinions of farmers during the period in 2002-03 when they suffered severe losses after planting the genetically modified crop in their fields. Subsequently they traveled to South Africa, Mali and Indonesia to make “A Disaster in Search of Success: BT Cotton in the Global South.”

Soon after the NWMI meeting, on 25 February 2007, they received the prestigious UGC-CEC National Award for another film on the same subject: “BT Cotton in Andhra Pradesh – A Three Year Fraud.” In a nationwide competition which attracted 246 entries from some of the best known short filmmakers as well as academics from across Indian universities, this group of rural women won recognition in two categories, receiving an award for the Best Programme of the Year and a citation for the Best Programme on Environment and Development.
Artistic pursuits

An optional session with a woman artist and a woman art collector took place in the evening at a city art gallery. Artist Shanthamani, whose exhibition was on at Gallerie Sumukha, made an audio-visual presentation about her evolution as an artist and the women-oriented themes and media she has explored over time. “My paintings reflect my journey as a woman, connecting with other women and growing into what I am,” she said.

Well-known industrialist Kiran Mazumdar Shaw (chairperson and managing director of Biocon Ltd.) talked about her love of contemporary art and continuing efforts to support and promote it. According to her, all that is creative is an expression of the human mind and that fascinates her. She spoke about the role of the media in promoting various forms of art. “Indian art, like the Indian economy, has become visible and radical. Art is an intangible entity but Indian art has finally arrived,” she said.

In the interactive session that followed, journalists talked about how it is often difficult to write about art because of the limited audience it attracts. They spoke about how coverage of art in the media has come to be more about sales and prices and less about art itself. They also talked about the little attention paid to creativity at the grassroots level and the problems of artisans struggling to survive in a globalised market. Kiran pointed out that these were all issues that the media need to take note of and deal with.

Day 3 – Sunday, 11 February 2007

Sunday morning began with more yoga, followed by an interactive session on ergonomics, focusing particularly on lower back pain – a common complaint among women to which journalists are particularly vulnerable – led by Dr. Hemant Kalyan of Manipal Hospital, Bangalore.

The rest of the morning was devoted to discussions among participants on issues relating to the network at the local and national levels, as well as plans for the future. There were animated debates about the network’s structure, systems, membership, communication (including via e-groups and the website) and activities.
The discussions included the possibility of working towards a network of women media professionals in South Asia (which had been mooted during the 2006 NWMI meeting in Kolkata when media women from the region participated in a panel discussion). Aminath Najeeb of the Maldives spoke about the overall media situation in her country and the importance of such linkages, while Seetha Ranjani talked about the fledgling network of women journalists in Sri Lanka and their eagerness to establish contacts across the region. Sahar Ali, a journalist currently working with Panos in Pakistan, described the background to the proposal to facilitate a coming together of women in media in South Asia.

Sunday afternoon witnessed two parallel sessions: one titled “Production, Property, Propriety and the Media,” and the other on emerging opportunities and challenges in media professions.

Panel Discussion
Production, Property, Propriety and the Media

The former, conceptualised and presented by the Bangalore-based Alternative Law Forum, featured presentations by Lawrence Liang, Namita Malhotra and Siddharth Narrain on different aspects of the interface between the law and the media in a rapidly changing media landscape. The concept of the session was as follows:

The transition from the late 20th Century to the 21st can be characterised as one that was accompanied by a media boom which has posed considerable challenges to our traditional understanding of a range of concepts from ideas of the public sphere to information capitalism. The contemporary media landscape is one of immense transition and conflict, and one of the central questions that this session is interested in mapping out is the role of legal processes in this era of transition. It is marked by the twin tropes of anxiety and possibilities. On the one hand advancements in media technologies have meant a greater ability for people to access information, and to participate in the production of knowledge. At the same time, stricter laws on intangibles and the sense of a loss of control by the state has resulted in an acceleration of various moral panics.

On the understanding that media practitioners need to have a critical approach to reading the role of law within this changing scenario, the session placed recent developments
within a broader understanding of the political economy of media businesses, and attempted to look at some of the key legal conflicts of the past few years involving the media.

In his provocative, interesting and entertaining opening presentation titled, The Crisis of and in Media Empires, Lawrence Liang alluded to the constant state of “breaking news” that has come to characterise the world of media – a trend he describes as a “perpetuation of crisis.” He cited the example of how television news presents all kinds of events as “breaking news.” For example, news about actor Aamir Khan’s wedding was interspersed with news about the terrorist attack in the Indian Institute of Science in Bangalore. For 24x7 news channels both were breaking news, both represented crises of different kinds. Turning to the connection between property and media, he made the point that freedom of press is guaranteed to primarily to owners of the press. According to him, the privatisation of television news has blurred the distinction between the free press and the free market.

Moving from property to propriety, Namita Malhotra in her presentation, titled Old Fears in a New Bottle, highlighted the peculiar paradox between media freedom and freedom of expression. Obscene or at least demeaning media content involving women often raise questions about where freedom of the press ends and freedom of expression begins. Her presentation focused on three controversies that brought these contradictions to the fore. The song “Choli ke pichhe kya hain” from the movie Khal Nayak provoked protests against vulgarity, the resurrection of a drawing by artist M.F. Husain of a nude Saraswati triggered protests against the desecration of a Hindu goddess. The rape scene in the film Bandit Queen also created a furore, with even feminists and other progressive women questioning the film-maker’s right to depict an event in the life of a living woman in such a way, without her knowledge, let alone consent. She also cited the example of the multimedia messaging scandal involving school children in Delhi to illustrate how technological innovations used in the personal sphere can also reveal the slippery slope of freedom of expression.

In his presentation titled, “The Curious Incident of Naithani at Night Time,” Siddharth Narain walked participants through the writ petition filed before the Bombay High Court by Pratibha Naithani, a political science teacher in St Xavier’s College, Mumbai, against the telecast of “adult and obscene films shown by the electronic media” and “obscene photographs” in the print media. filed a writ petition before the Bombay High Court. The Court held that a number of television channels were violative of the programme code under the Cable TV Network Act and the Cable TV Network Rules, particularly Rule 6, which lists restrictions on content that “offends against good taste and decency, contains anything obscene, is likely to incite or encourage violence, denigrates women through the depiction of any manner of a figure of a woman, her form, or body or any part thereof in such a way as to have the effect of being indecent or derogatory to women, or is likely to deprave, corrupt, or injure the public morality of morals.”
He juxtaposed this case with an FICCI-initiated broadcast code drafted by a sub-committee of the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, with guidelines on content. According to him, the rules under the code provide a good example of the complexity of regulating and censoring material on TV. For instance, they lay down that “pointless and avoidable scenes of sex” should not be shown unless there is “strong editorial justification” and that no “frontal and back nudity” is to be shown except for “rare circumstances,” and no scenes depicting sexual violence are to be shown at all. However, a “registering shot” required for the “development of the plot and the storyline” is to be allowed.

Further, while laying down guidelines for programmes shown in different time slots (U-General viewing, U-Parental guidance required and A-Adult viewing only), the code lays down that sex should be shown in “a discreet and suggestive manner” only when “germane to the theme,” and it should not be “frequent or gratuitous.” Nudity has to be restricted to the “barest minimum” for A and U/A categories. The code also specifies that the upper torso of a woman cannot be shown -- nor can genitals and obvious genital contact -- and violence cannot be “gratuitous, detailed or have a dehumanizing impact.”

Tracing the history of efforts since the 1940s to regulate audio-visual images, he pointed out that the recent cases and codes illustrate the point that the propriety question is far more complicated than just determining the time bands and spectrums of what people can view. And that a major question that remains unanswered is: Who has the power to determine meaning?

Panel Discussion

Emerging Opportunities & Challenges in Media and Allied Professions

A parallel session had media professionals from public and private broadcast media, new media, as well as publishing, speak about their respective fields. The panelists were: Malavika Avinash (Zee Kannada), Chandramouli (Doordarshan), Padmavathi (All India Radio), Jimmy Xavier (Radio Fever), Subramaniam Vincent (India Together e-journal), and Jamuna Rao (Dronequill Publishers).

Increased opportunities give rise to more challenges and, in the context of the media, the challenge component sometimes overwhelms the opportunities. The directly proportional relationship between the two formed the crux of this session.

Both Chandramouli and Padmavathi stressed the need to tread with care and caution. Padmavathi suggested that opportunities were mainly in the areas of programming, marketing, research and training, and technology. Chandramouli highlighted the industry’s need for young minds and welcomed the changes they could bring in. At the
same time, Padmavathi pointed out, it is important for radio jockeys and news anchors to undergo proper training before he or she goes on air. “The other day, I heard an RJ from a private FM station asking for finance minister Chidambaram’s designation,” she said. “There can be no substitute for research and training.”

Speakers from private-owned media – a new FM radio station and a Kannada TV channel – emphasized the hard work involved in the trade, with one person often doing the work of an entire team. According to Malavika Avinash, who is also a theatre actor, “In terms of work timings and role responsibilities, private television is very taxing. Anyone thinking of joining the field should be aware of these factors before taking the plunge.” Outlining the structure of a TV channel, she said people usually associate TV with glamour, but that is just a myth. Another myth that needs to be broken, she said, was that private television pays: it does not. “In fact, radio professionals are better paid!” she added. According to her, the biggest challenge in TV was the matter of ratings.

Talking about the power of radio, Jimmy Xavier called it a theatre of the mind. According to him, radio presents infinite possibilities. The challenges faced by radio stations have to do primarily with revenues vs. listenership, attrition rate, and problems in identifying target audiences. He said it was true that there is at present a boom in FM radio stations and that the demand for radio professionals is ever on the increase. “Right now, trained talent is scarce, but things are expected to settle down in the next couple of years as radio matures,” he suggested.

Jamuna Rao of Dronequill said that in the publishing world both opportunities and challenges are affected by three primary factors: technology, changes in society and globalisation. According to her the situation today is better than in the days when she started out as a publisher. At the same time, she highlighted the vulnerability of small publishers. “Investment is an issue,” she said, “especially with technology getting outdated and obsolete as quickly as it comes in.” Commenting on ‘accusations’ that publishers always give an unfair edge to glamorous writers, she said the challenge of recognising talent for talent’s sake is tremendous: “No publishing house would dare risk throwing out a newcomer’s manuscript just like that -- you never know if you just missed a best-seller!”

In his power point presentation Subbu Vincent of India Together, an online public affairs news magazine, talked about how technology had opened a whole new world on one’s desktop. According to him the “new media” (which integrate all existing media through technology) have several advantages over “old media” as they once existed: they allow for citizen/consumer autonomy and enable citizens to be active (interactive) rather than passive – for example, citizens go to the media out of choice, they can be publishers too
and both citizens and publishers can react and respond quickly to each other. In that sense, he said, new media seem to have an egalitarian premise. According to him, the main opportunity lies in the technology itself, with the number of cellphones in India quickly rising and providing instant access to news, information and entertainment, while allowing mobile users autonomy. At the same time, with computer prices and broadband internet access rates falling, Net usage is rising. As a result, he said, new media are bound to gain more ground.

The main challenges, he said, are language and cost. Acknowledging that penetration in non-English spaces is inadequate, he said the emerging use of personal computers and phones using regional languages holds out hope that content in multiple languages will soon become available. Despite the constant lowering of the prices of computers and cellphones, access is still a problem for a large number.

**Pune Chalo**

A final wrap-up session on Sunday evening (overshadowed by the prospect of a bandh the next day) revisited decisions about the network made in the morning session, assigning specific tasks and deadlines to different people. Thanks to the enthusiasm of the sizeable contingent from Pune, it was decided that the next annual meeting would take place there in February 2008.
Members of the NWMB Organising Committee:

Vasanthi Hariprakash  Radhika M.  Susheela Nair  
Theresa Verghese  Shamantha  Prathibha Nandakumar  
Dipti Davenair  Rehmat Merchant  Tanushree Gangopadhyay  
Anita Cheria  Prathibha  Sakuntala Narasimhan  
Sanjana BM  Gita Surendran  Ammu Joseph  

Photographs by: Bhargavi

Report by the Network of Women in Media, Bangalore
Women still a neglected lot: Gloria Steinem

Bangalore, Feb 9: Internationally renowned journalist and activist, Gloria Steinem, on Friday bemoaned that even in the modern times women are treated as commodities rather than instruments.

She was speaking at the 5th annual meeting of the Network of Women in Media (NWMI) and the award ceremony of the Anupama Jayaraman Memorial Award for Young Women Journalists.

She said media, despite all its modern postures, still tend to discuss many problems of women. "According to her, both man and women remain prisoners of their gender customs. Information was passed on and issues discussed at camps and this has been the practice all over the world," she said. "I believe media was the current chaperon."

Freelance journalist and student, Smita Agarwal (23) was awarded the Anupama Jayaraman Memorial Award. Smita was awarded for her write-ups on the human rights issues and the condition of women in Kashmir. She said that she decided to take forward from where Anupama left off and pursue her path.

"I have just achieved half of what Anupama had achieved. I will do my best to continue what she has left behind. And fight for the rights of the helpless and their issues which still remain unsolved," she added.

Anupama was a tribal activist and participated in the Narmada Bachao Andolan, with Medha Patkar. She represented India at the World Congress of Youth in Morocco. After the devastating tsunami hit on December 26, 2004, she rushed to help the affected people. She stayed on a school called, 'Vaswani'. She fought for water issues in the country and had made powerful documentary films on water issues.

Over 100 women journalists are participating in the NWMI meet, from across the country. Resident Editor of the New Indian Express K. Shankar, Dean of Convergence Institute of Media Management and IT Studies (COMMITS) Rajanna Hulli, Editor of Times of India, Manjula Srinivasan, a Columnist and Consumer Activist Shabnam Narasimhan were also present at the event.

Ruth Manorama presenting the Anupama Jayaraman Memorial Award for Young Women Journalists to Smita Agarwal at the fifth annual meeting of the Network of Women in Media at Mount Carmel College in Bangalore on Friday.—Express photo
Deccan Herald February 10th 2007

‘Speak truth, respond to social causes’

Bangalore, India: Conferring the first Anupama Jayaraman Memorial Award on Sadha Agarwal—a freelance journalist and final year student of Symbiosis Institute of Mass Communication, Pune, Maharashtra—the fifth annual meeting of the Network of Women in Media, India, opened in Bangalore on Friday.

The award was given to Sadha by eminent social worker and winner of Right Livelihood Award (2006) Ruth Manorama and Anupama’s parents, for her articles on women in the Border Security Force posted in Srinagar. The award instituted for women journalists aged below 25 years, carries Rs 15,000 in cash, and the certificate.

Speaking at the function, Manorama exhorted women in media to ‘speak the truth and respond to social causes’.

She questioned the representation of Dalits in the media. ‘Why are there no positive stories on Dalits?’

We are not in the control of media houses. It is the responsibility of media to promote diversity,’ she said. On a personal note, Manorama said that some private TV news channels did not cover her because of her ‘colour’.

‘Biased perception’

In her keynote address, noted American journalist, author and activist in the global women’s movement, Gloria Steinem said, though women in media have come a long way, the perception towards them is biased.

‘A woman journalist is taken seriously only when she covers “hard” news. Even in the USA, when it comes to serious news assignments, women occupy only 5 per cent of the chair,’ she felt. “The fact that women are playing a crucial role in peace keeping efforts in conflict ridden societies, is hardly known to the world.”

She recalled her talks around a campaign and said everyone should gather around the media campaign, attending to it and keeping the flame alive.
‘We have much to learn from original cultures’

MAKING A POINT: Noted journalist Gloria Steinem addressing the fifth annual meeting of the Network of Women in Media, in Bangalore on Friday.

PHOTO: V. SREENIVASA MURTHY

Staff Reporter

BANGALORE: Noted journalist Gloria Steinem says she accedes that the world is divided into two kinds of people. But is quick to add that it is divided into “those who divide the world and those who do not.”

Speaking at the Fifth annual meeting of the Network of Women in Media, here on Friday, Ms. Steinem said that a look into our “collective past” would reveal that for most of human history, we were not dictated by such “cultural and political inventions as patriarchy, monotheism and nationalism.”

“The subjugation of women later became a model for all forms of discrimination — including that of race and class — the understanding that some people were just born to serve others,” she said.

“Modern media, carbon dating and DNA have now revealed to us that different forms of human organisations did exist, and that original cultures in all continents have similar characteristics,” Ms. Steinem said.

Visiting “our shared history” would reveal that “things have not always been this way”, she said, adding that we have much to learn from “original cultures” across the world. “Native cultures in my own continent were in fact the inspiration for the suffrage movement there”, she said.

The Anupama Jayaraman Memorial Award was awarded to journalist Sunita Agarwal from Pune at the meet.
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The Network of Women in Media, India
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