

## Reporting Gender Violence – Media Workshop at Loyola College

Jointly organized by the students of the Oodaha Kaliahal Thurai (Dept of Media Studies) Loyola College and Prajnya, the half day media workshop was an attempt to sensitise young aspiring journalists and media professionals on reporting gender violence in mainstream media.

Mr. Agathiyalingam, Editor of Theekadhir, said since language itself is gendered it is no surprise then that media reporting is gender biased. Crime reporting particularly sees several newspapers, magazines and TV channels using a patriarchal perspective in their reporting treating crimes against women as something they probably invited upon themselves either through behaviour, lack of morality or provocative clothing. This attitude should change only then can we change the reporting styles, he averred. "Also, ownership and commercial concerns dictate the type of pictures used, the coverage given to certain issues and the mindless glorification of celebrities and scandals" he added

Ms. Sheila Jayaprakash, leading lawyer, provided an insight on how the judicial system and the laws of the land are antiquated and steeped in patriarchal values thus denying women a defense in courts for crimes committed against them and when they commit crimes in reactions to sustained provocation. She stressed that in several instances when men rape women or are abusive they are let off with a mild admonition. The women victims are advised to keep silent and tolerate such things. The onus of safeguarding the family honour falls on her shoulders even if those same shoulders maybe broken by a violent abusive man and/his family. The attitude is that men commit crimes against women in a fit of passion but women when they commit crimes are doing so because they must lack moral fibre. "Only the acknowledgment that women are sometimes pushed to violent crimes because of sustained provocation and allowing this as a defence will change this biased approach to gender violence." She pleaded that reporters should remember that revelation of names and details of victims should be avoided and the media has a responsibility to report facts accurately and fully.

Ranjitha Gunasekaran, Senior Reporter, new Indian Express shared her experiences in dealing with gender issues and issues of sexualities. She mentioned that she came across a class and generational misunderstanding on gender issues. The urban educated upper classes feel insulated from the realities of women from economically poor backgrounds and can never relate to the struggles that went before to give them a freedom they take for granted. As a reporter covering gender, she felt that the attitude and "mindset of media professionals should change and this may happen if women become decision makers at the editorial levels and also when men who are in charge understand these issues with sensitivity.

Kutty Revathi, Editor, Panikudam, a magazine featuring feminist literature, reflected on the endless negotiations women in media make to ensure that coverage of women's issues, ideas and expressions are made possible within the mainstream media. Her struggle to express herself through poetry, prose and then documentaries ended in starting a magazine as an attempt to provide a platform for women to explore their creativity and create an understanding of their battles and feelings. She dismissed the debate about commercial viability of print media saying compromises are for those people who do not have the courage of their convictions. She ended her presentation with the affirmation that young journalists will bring about change through advocacy a responsible journalism.

The workshop ended with the audience applauding Revathi for her integrity and commitment and on a note of hope that there will be a move towards a gender sensitive reporting of gender violence in the years to come

Uma Vangal

Media point person, Prajnya 16 day campaign against gender violence



**Agathiyalingam, Editor Theekadhir, speaking at Prajnya's Media Workshop**



**Sheila Jayaprakash addressing the students at the Media Workshop**



**Ranjitha G, Senior Reporter, NIE, speaking at Loyola College Media Workshop**



**Kutty Revathi, Editor, Panikudam addressing aspiring journalists at the Media Workshop**