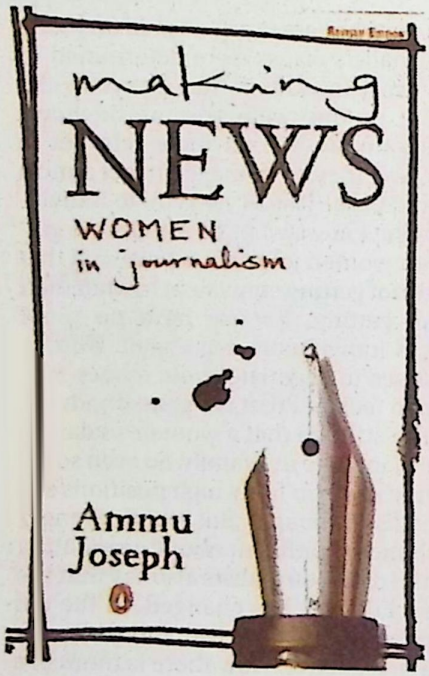
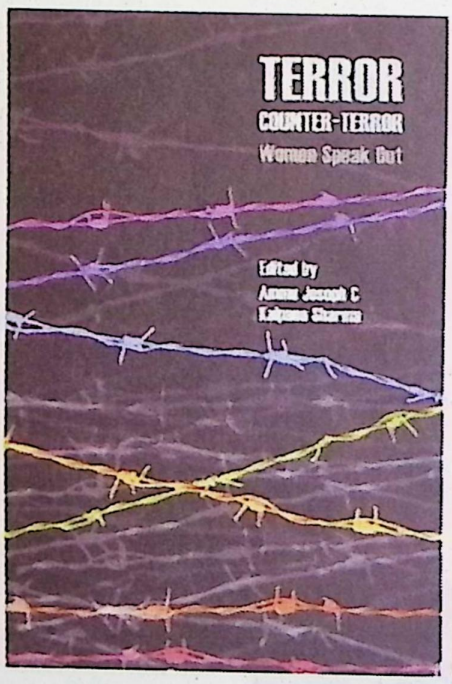
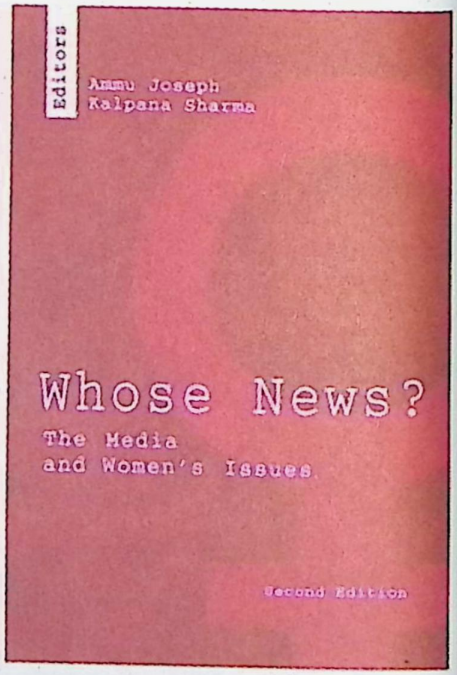






used. Some people feel it is totally irrelevant why they should be identified on their sex. They've said that they are professionals just like everybody else. Others have said that one can't really deny the fact that the world looks at them like that. The big issues that came up was 'night shift'. There are many varied opinions on that issue. Some people say that if you want to be treated as an equal you can't expect any special facilities. But others say that as long as society does not change and women have to shoulder the burden of the family and household it should be possible to accommodate it. At the same time they say that if you are not able to do night shifts your chances of getting promoted are less. So it's a very contentious and difficult dilemma but there's no black and white or one answer to any of these. Professional harassment was one of the things a lot of people identified with. But sexual harassment was at that time almost a geographical divide. It was more of an issue in the north and less of an issue in the south. I don't know if it's because people in the south don't like to talk about it. And there is the issue of networking with people. A lot of contacts are made over the bar where male journalists drink with bureaucrats and politicians and that's how they develop contacts. If women do that their character will come into question. But then many journalists have said that these guys are so close to these news sources we've never seen a good story coming from them because they go into self censorship. But many of the women talked about the problems they face with their families. Single women talk about how difficult it is for them to get accommodation. But the book is mainly about journalism through the eyes of women, in terms of work conditions and also about the profession itself.

You said something interesting in your presentation about the definition of 'hard' and 'soft' news stories. How do you think these definitions and stereotypes came about?

Even journalists who have covered politics say that it is the easiest thing to do because politicians are dying to talk to you. The routine political reporting of going to press conferences etc which I personally call political gossip. Development is politics. Health and education are political issues. And there are issues of rights and entitlements. Those are really political issues if you understand politics as it should be understood. Even urban, civic, environment and gender issues are issues of governance. I just cannot understand how they can be considered 'soft' issues. And even if they are considered soft, why should it be less valuable or important than covering parliament. Many of the journalists who have covered both parliament and development issues say that it is much more difficult to cover development issues. No one is handing you things in a platter. You really have to do the work -- to talk to people, to gather the information, to understand the issue etc.

Quotas for women to encourage them to come to the media. Is that a good or bad thing?

Personally I don't think that is really necessary because the number of women in journalism is increasing at a very fast pace. And I think in the journalism schools in India the situation is such that you almost have to have a quota for men. It's better to encourage women to consider this as a profession and then train them accordingly so that they have a clear picture of it and think of it as an option. ■