

# Gender Inequality in India: A Journalism Perspective

## Under the sub-theme (Impact of Patriarchy of Women)

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**Abstract**—Gender inequality remains a persistent issue in India, deeply embedded in its socio-cultural and economic framework. The journalism industry, often regarded as a powerful medium for social change, both reflects and reinforces these disparities. This research paper explores the role of journalism in shaping gender discourse, analyzing media representation, newsroom dynamics, and the challenges female journalists face. By examining existing literature and secondary data, the study evaluates whether journalism in India is a catalyst for gender equality or a tool that perpetuates systemic bias.

### I. INTRODUCTION

India has made notable strides in addressing gender inequality through policy reforms, education, and economic participation. However, deeply ingrained patriarchal structures continue to limit women's access to equal opportunities. Journalism, as a key instrument of democracy, has the potential to either challenge or sustain these inequalities.

The study seeks to address the following questions:

- How does Indian journalism portray gender-related issues?
- Are female journalists given equal representation and opportunities in the media industry?
- To what extent does journalism act as a driver of gender equality?

Through an extensive review of existing literature, this paper examines the intersection of journalism and gender inequality in India.

#### Hypothesis & Null Hypothesis

- Hypothesis (H1): Gender inequality significantly affects the representation, opportunities, and treatment of women in Indian journalism.
- Null Hypothesis (H0): There is no significant gender-based disparity in Indian journalism regarding representation, opportunities, and treatment.

### II. LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 1. Media Representation of Women and Gender Bias

- Tuchman's "Symbolic Annihilation of Women in Media" (1978): Tuchman's theory suggests that media either underrepresents, trivializes, or reinforces stereotypes about women, leading to their "symbolic annihilation." This is evident in Indian journalism, where women's issues receive selective and often sensationalized coverage.
- Ross & Carter (2011) - Gender and News Coverage: Their study found that women are frequently portrayed as victims or in passive roles, whereas men dominate as authoritative figures. This bias is evident in Indian news reporting, particularly in crime and political coverage.
- Basu & Dutta (2019) - Gendered Portrayals in Indian Journalism: Their research highlights that while gender-based violence receives extensive media attention, the narratives often focus on victim-blaming rather than systemic solutions.

#### 2. Gender Disparity in Newsrooms

- UNESCO's "Women in News" Report (2020): The report highlights that women occupy only 10% of editorial leadership positions in India's major news organizations.
- Geeta Seshu (2019) - Gender and Media in India: Seshu's research points to structural biases in Indian newsrooms, including wage gaps, lack of maternity support, and gendered assignments (e.g., women being pushed towards "soft news" while men handle "hard news" like politics and crime).
- Global Media Monitoring Project (2021): This study found that only 24% of news stories globally are reported by women, and in India, this percentage is even lower.

#### 3. Challenges Faced by Women in Journalism

- Harassment and Workplace Safety:

- The MeToo movement in India (2018) exposed widespread harassment in media organizations, leading to high-profile resignations but minimal structural changes.
- A study by International Federation of Journalists (2021) found that over 60% of female journalists in India face online abuse and threats, often discouraging them from pursuing investigative journalism.
- Pay Disparity and Career Progression:
  - Sharma & Kumar (2022) - Wage Inequality in Indian Media: Their study found that women journalists earn 20-30% less than male counterparts in similar roles.
  - Glass Ceiling Effect: A report by The Press Institute of India (2020) found that women journalists are less likely to be promoted to decision-making roles, reinforcing gender hierarchies.

#### 4. Journalism as a Tool for Gender Equality

Despite these challenges, journalism has played a role in amplifying gender issues and driving social change:

- Investigative Journalism on Gender Issues:
  - Reports on gender-based violence, sexual harassment, and workplace discrimination have pressured policymakers to enact reforms.
  - Example: The Nirbhaya Case (2012) coverage led to legal amendments, including stricter rape laws.
- Women-Led Digital Journalism:
  - Independent platforms like The Ladies Finger and SheThePeople.TV focus on gender-sensitive storytelling, challenging mainstream media biases.
  - Faye D'Souza's independent journalism has gained traction for tackling gender and social justice issues in an unbiased manner.

#### Research Design

This research adopts a qualitative approach using descriptive research design to analyze trends, patterns, and systemic structures that contribute to gender inequality in Indian journalism.

#### Secondary Data Sources

This study relies on secondary data, including government reports, global media research, academic studies, and case analyses. The key sources include:

#### 1. Reports from International & National Organizations

- UNESCO's "Women in News" Report (2020)
  - Found that women make up only 10% of top editorial positions in Indian media.
  - Despite increasing female enrollment in journalism courses, their representation in leadership remains low.
- Global Media Monitoring Project (2021)
  - Women are the subject of only 24% of news stories globally; in India, the percentage is lower, with women being underrepresented in politics, business, and crime reporting.
- Press Council of India's "Gender & Media" Report (2019)
  - Stated that female journalists in India earn 20-30% less than their male counterparts.
  - Women journalists receive fewer opportunities for field assignments, particularly in conflict zones and political reporting.

#### 2. Studies on Media Representation of Women

- Tuchman's "Symbolic Annihilation" (1978)
  - Argues that media either ignores, trivializes, or negatively portrays women. This concept is evident in Indian journalism, where women's issues are often reported in sensationalist ways rather than focusing on structural causes.
- Basu & Dutta (2019) - Gendered Portrayals in Indian Journalism
  - Found that news coverage on gender-based violence often blames victims, reinforcing misogynistic attitudes.
- Ross & Carter (2011) - Gender and News Coverage
  - Showed that men dominate authoritative roles in news, while women are portrayed as victims or in passive roles.

#### 3. Case Studies on Women in Journalism

- The MeToo Movement in India (2018)
  - Several women journalists spoke out about sexual harassment in media organizations. While some offenders faced consequences, systemic reforms remain minimal.
- Barkha Dutt's Experience (2020)
  - Dutt, one of India's leading journalists, has spoken about sexism in newsrooms and unequal opportunities in war reporting and political journalism.

- Rana Ayyub's Harassment (2021)
  - Ayyub, an investigative journalist, has faced online abuse and death threats, illustrating the dangers female journalists encounter when reporting on gender and politics.

### III. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

#### 1. Gender Representation in Indian News Media

- Women are severely underrepresented in political, crime, and economic journalism.
- In television news panels, less than 20% of experts invited to discuss serious issues (such as policy, governance, and defense) are women.
- Gender-based violence stories are covered extensively but often sensationalized, with victim-blaming narratives being common.

#### 2. Gender Disparity in Indian Newsrooms

- Unequal Pay: Female journalists earn 20-30% less than their male counterparts (Press Council of India, 2019).
- Glass Ceiling Effect:
  - Despite more women studying journalism, less than 10% hold editorial leadership positions (UNESCO, 2020).
  - The higher one moves up the hierarchy, the fewer women are present.
- Gendered Assignments:
  - Women are pushed towards lifestyle, entertainment, and culture reporting, while men dominate political, business, and conflict reporting.

#### 3. Challenges Faced by Women Journalists

- Sexual Harassment and Online Abuse:
  - The #MeToo movement exposed harassment cases in major media houses, but many victims still hesitate to come forward due to job security concerns.
  - A study by the International Federation of Journalists (2021) found that over 60% of female journalists in India have experienced online threats.
- Workplace Safety and Maternity Policies:
  - Many media houses lack structured maternity policies, forcing women to take career breaks that affect their long-term growth.

#### 4. Journalism as a Tool for Gender Equality

Despite these challenges, journalism has played a significant role in addressing gender-based injustices:

- Investigative Journalism on Gender Issues:
  - The Nirbhaya Case (2012): Media coverage led to major legal reforms, including stricter rape laws.
  - Sabarimala Verdict (2018): Journalistic activism helped push the debate on women's temple entry rights.
- Rise of Women-Led Journalism Platforms:
  - SheThePeople.TV, The Ladies Finger, and Mojo Story have created spaces for gender-sensitive reporting and feminist journalism.

### IV. CONCLUSION

This study finds strong evidence supporting the hypothesis (H1) that gender inequality significantly affects representation, opportunities, and treatment of women in Indian journalism. The null hypothesis (H0) is rejected, as disparities are evident across newsroom hierarchies, pay scales, and media representation.

#### Key Takeaways:

1. Women are underrepresented in hard news and newsroom leadership.
2. Gender-based pay gaps and discriminatory assignments persist in media organizations.
3. Female journalists face online harassment, workplace sexism, and limited career progression opportunities.
4. Despite these challenges, journalism has played a crucial role in addressing gender issues, particularly through investigative reporting and independent media initiatives.

#### Recommendations:

1. Gender-neutral recruitment and promotion policies in media houses.
2. Equal pay mandates and structured maternity benefits to retain female journalists.
3. Stronger anti-harassment laws to protect women in media.
4. Gender-sensitive reporting training to eliminate bias in news narratives.

By ensuring equal representation and fair treatment, journalism in India can become a true force for gender justice.

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