

# Breaking Barriers: A Critical Examination of Women's Leadership Representation in Indian Media

**Dr. Gazal Singhal**

*Department of Journalism and  
Mass Communication  
Bharati Vidyapeeth Institute of  
computer applications and  
management  
New Delhi  
[gazaljain.123@gmail.com](mailto:gazaljain.123@gmail.com)*

**Dr. Avneet Kaur Bhatia**

*Department of Journalism and  
Mass Communication  
Bharati Vidyapeeth Institute of  
computer applications and  
management  
New Delhi  
[avneet.kaur@bvicam.in](mailto:avneet.kaur@bvicam.in)*

**Mr. Rajender Singh Thakur**

*Department of Journalism and  
Mass Communication  
Bharati Vidyapeeth Institute of  
computer applications and  
management  
New Delhi  
[rajender.singh@bvicam.in](mailto:rajender.singh@bvicam.in)*

*Abstract* - Amid the digital era of Industry 4.0, the representation of female leaders in journalism remains notably sparse, drawing attention to its implications on gender equality and societal advancement. A report released at The Media Rumble 2022, titled "Gender Representation In Indian Newsrooms" by Newslandry and UN Women, reveals that 87% of editors and proprietors in India's major English and Hindi newspapers are men, based on data from April 2021 to March 2022. Despite strides in equal pay legislation, women still earn 15% less than men in OECD countries and remain considerably less likely to reach senior management positions. This paper critically examines the current landscape of women's leadership roles in Indian media, investigating persistent barriers hindering their progression. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the study conducts a comprehensive literature review and qualitative analysis to assess the status of women in media leadership. It encompasses various media formats, including television, newspapers, digital platforms, and magazines. Interviews from working women journalists and quantitative analysis of secondary data explain the proportion of women in leadership roles vis-à-vis men. Through these methods, the research explores the challenges and biases confronting women striving for top leadership positions in the Indian media industry.

**Keywords - Women, Leadership, Media Industry, Gender Bias, Gender Equality**

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The onset of Industry 4.0 has brought unprecedented technological advancements and digital transformation across sectors, significantly impacting how information is disseminated and consumed (Schwab, 2016). However, despite these progressive shifts, the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles within journalism remains a persistent concern, with far-reaching implications for gender equality and societal progress (North, 2016). The media industry, often seen as a mirror of society, plays a critical role in shaping public discourse and opinion (Byerly, 2011). Yet, when it comes to gender diversity in its leadership, the industry falls short, raising questions about the inclusivity of the narratives being propagated (Gallagher, 2014).

The disparity is starkly highlighted in the report "Gender Representation In Indian Newsrooms," released by Newslandry in collaboration with UN Women at The Media Rumble 2022. The report reveals a glaring gender gap in leadership within India's major English and Hindi newspapers, where men overwhelmingly occupy 87% of the editorial and ownership positions (Newslandry & UN Women, 2022). This figure, derived from data spanning April 2021 to March 2022, underscores the systemic barriers that continue to hinder women's progress in the media sector, despite global movements advocating for gender equality and equal pay (Bhattacharya, 2022). Globally, the situation is not much different. Even in OECD countries,

where equal pay legislation has been a significant focus, women still earn 15% less than their male counterparts and are significantly less likely to ascend to senior management positions (OECD, 2021). These statistics reflect broader societal challenges, where entrenched biases and institutional barriers continue to impede women's advancement in leadership roles, particularly in industries like media that are crucial for societal influence and change (Ross & Padovani, 2017).

This research paper delves into the complexities surrounding women's leadership representation in the Indian media industry. It aims to critically analyze the current landscape, shedding light on the persistent barriers that hinder women from breaking through the glass ceiling (Lobo, 2020). By employing a mixed-methods approach that combines a comprehensive literature review with qualitative analysis, this study seeks to offer a nuanced understanding of the status quo. It examines various media formats, including television, newspapers, digital platforms, and magazines, to provide a holistic view of the representation of women in leadership roles. Through this analysis, the research identifies the challenges and biases that women face as they strive for top leadership roles in the Indian media industry. By exploring these issues, the paper contributes to the ongoing discourse on gender equality in media and offers insights into potential pathways for fostering a more inclusive and equitable industry landscape (Gill, 2021).

## **Research Objectives**

1. To Analyze the Current Status of Women's Leadership in Indian Media.
2. To Identify the Barriers Hindering Women's Progression to Leadership Roles in Indian Media.
3. Provide Recommendations for Enhancing Women's Leadership Representation in Indian Media.

## 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

**Sharma, N. (2016)** provides an overview of the media landscape in India, focusing on the role of diversity in media development. It delves into the socio-political and economic factors that shape media practices, including gender representation. Sharma discusses the limited presence of women in leadership roles within Indian media and examines the structural and cultural barriers that contribute to this disparity.

**Koirala, M. (2013).** In her book chronicles the experiences of pioneering Indian women in media who have challenged the male-dominated industry. It offers insights into the personal and professional struggles faced by these women and discusses the broader implications of their journeys for aspiring female media leaders.

**Jeffrey, R., & Sen, R. (2015)** looks at media industries in India and China, focusing on the socio-political environment that shapes media practices. The authors analyze the role of gender in the Indian media industry, with particular emphasis on leadership roles and the systemic barriers that prevent women from advancing.

**Kumar, N. (2019)** examines the representation of women in Indian media from both a content and leadership perspective. The book discusses how the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles contributes to gender biases in media content, and it explores potential strategies for achieving greater gender parity in the industry.

**Ghosh, S. (Ed.). (2021)** brings together essays that examine the intersection of media, gender, and popular culture in India. The book includes discussions on the barriers to female leadership in media, the portrayal of women in media, and the implications of gender disparities in media content and management.

**Cunningham, C.M. (2020)** explores the global gender gap in communication industries, including media. It examines how societal norms and organizational cultures contribute to the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles. The book provides a comparative analysis that can shed light on the unique challenges faced by women in Indian media.

**North, L. (2016)** provides a deep dive into the experiences of female journalists in newsrooms worldwide. It discusses the persistent gender biases and structural barriers that hinder women's advancement to leadership roles. The book offers valuable comparative insights that can be applied to the Indian media landscape.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The research design employs a mixed-methods approach that includes a literature review and interviews to investigate the representation of women in leadership roles within the Indian media industry. The sample selection comprises five working women journalists from different mediums to ensure diverse perspectives. Data collection involves conducting semi-structured interviews with female leaders in the Indian media industry, such as editors, proprietors, senior journalists, and media executives. These interviews aim to explore their personal experiences, perceptions of gender bias, and the specific challenges women encounter in attaining and maintaining leadership roles. In addition to the interviews, various industry reports, such as the "Gender Representation in Indian Newsrooms" report by NewsLaundry and UN Women, along with other relevant studies, will be analyzed to provide comprehensive insights.

### 4. RESULTS & ANALYSIS

#### **Q1. What challenges do you as a woman journalist face in gaining visibility and recognition in Indian media compared to your male counterparts?**

Journalist 1: "As a woman, I must work harder for equal recognition. Persistent bias undermines my authority, with story pitches often sidelined, making it difficult to prove I can handle hard-hitting news."

Journalist 2: "The lack of mentorship from male leaders and exclusion from informal networks limit women journalists' visibility, while stereotypes confining them to soft news restrict opportunities for covering high-profile stories."

Journalist 3: "I've encountered the challenge of being stereotyped as overly emotional or lacking the toughness required for certain types of journalism, particularly investigative reporting. This stereotype not only undermines my credibility but also affects how my work is perceived by the audience and my peers."

Journalist 4: "For me, the challenge has been breaking into leadership roles where visibility naturally increases. There's an unspoken expectation that women will not aspire to or succeed in these positions, so the opportunities are fewer."

Journalist 5: "Societal expectations often burden women with disproportionate family responsibilities, hindering career progression and recognition, as balancing work and home demands limits their time and energy compared to men."

**Q2. Can you share your observations on biases and the portrayal of women in leadership roles in Indian media, including television, film, and digital platforms?**

**Journalist 1:** Women leaders in media are often unfairly portrayed as harsh or unstable, reinforcing negative stereotypes. These bias influences real-life perceptions, leading to unfair judgments and underestimation.

**Journalist 2:** Women in media leadership face harsher scrutiny than men, with their successes often attributed to luck or connections, creating a damaging narrative that discourages other women from aspiring to leadership.

**Journalist 3:** Female leaders are often pigeonholed into roles aligned with traditional feminine qualities, limiting public perception of women as strong, decisive leaders, especially in fields like technology or business.

**Journalist 4:** Digital platforms portray women leaders as exceptions rather than normalizing female leadership, which perpetuates the 'exceptionalism' narrative and isolates rather than normalizes capable women in leadership.

**Journalist 5:** The 'superwoman' trope in media sets unrealistic standards for women, implying they must excel at everything to be fit for leadership, creating unnecessary pressure and reinforcing overperformance expectations.

**Q3. How do you think media representation influences the self-esteem and aspirations of upcoming women journalists?**

Journalist 1: Media representation shapes young women’s self-esteem in journalism. Positive portrayals of successful female leaders inspire higher aspirations, while negative or limited representation can dampen their ambitions.

Journalist 2: Seeing powerful women in media empowers young journalists, offering role models and reassurance. Conversely, lacking or skewed representation can discourage them, making leadership roles seem unattainable.

Journalist 3: Media portrayal of female leaders can motivate or deter young women. Negative portrayals breed self-doubt, while positive representation builds confidence and encourages them to pursue leadership roles.

Journalist 4: Representation impacts self-esteem. Visible female leaders inspired me early on, showing leadership was possible. Without these examples, young women may internalize limiting beliefs about their ambitions.

Journalist 5: Positive, diverse portrayals of women in media leadership inspire young journalists, helping them envision themselves in powerful roles, which is crucial for their professional growth and aspirations.

**Q4. Have you noticed any changes or improvements in the representation of women in media over the years? If yes, what are they?**

Journalist 1: Improvements are evident with more women entering journalism, especially in digital media. Increased awareness of gender diversity has led to positive changes in hiring practices and story coverage.

Journalist 2: There's been a slow increase in women in leadership, with media organizations recognizing the value of diverse voices, leading to more women being promoted to senior roles.

Journalist 3: Progress is seen through policy changes in media organizations, with more discussions on gender equality and efforts to create inclusive workplaces, though changes are still in early stages.

Journalist 4: A shift in perception shows growing respect for women in media leadership, with more female bylines on important stories, though progress is slow and more work is needed.

Journalist 5: Improvements in women's representation are visible on screen and in print, with more female anchors and reporters. However, this progress hasn't fully translated into leadership roles.

**Q5. In your view, what steps can Indian media organizations take to improve the representation of women leaders and challenge gender stereotypes?**

Journalist 1: Key steps include promoting women into leadership with mentorship, leadership training, and a culture valuing diverse perspectives. Media should also consciously cover stories that challenge traditional gender roles to foster change.

Journalist 2: Indian media must create inclusive environments where women feel empowered to lead. This includes gender sensitivity training, anti-discrimination policies, and ensuring equal career advancement opportunities for women to thrive in leadership roles.

Journalist 3: To improve representation, media organizations should adopt transparent hiring and promotion practices that balance gender representation. Dismantling exclusionary informal networks is crucial to ensuring equal access to career advancement opportunities for all.

Journalist 4: Organizations should support work-life balance through flexible hours and parental leave policies. These measures help women manage personal and professional lives more effectively, enabling them to pursue and maintain leadership positions.

Journalist 5: Challenging gender stereotypes requires media organizations to highlight women leaders as role models. This involves featuring more women in leadership roles and ensuring content is free from gender biases and stereotypes.

The interviews highlight the ongoing challenges and progress in achieving gender equality in media leadership. Key themes include the need for active promotion of women into leadership roles, supported by mentorship, leadership training, and organizational cultures that value diverse perspectives. Media organizations are encouraged to adopt transparent hiring practices, dismantle exclusionary informal networks, and implement policies that promote inclusivity and gender sensitivity. Work-life balance programs, such as flexible hours and parental leave, are crucial to helping women maintain leadership positions. Additionally, there's a call for media to challenge gender stereotypes by showcasing women leaders as role models and producing content free from biases. Despite improvements, particularly in representation on screen and in print, women remain underrepresented in leadership roles, with progress being slow but necessary for creating a more inclusive media landscape.

## Conclusion

The exploration of women’s leadership in the Indian media industry reveals deep-rooted challenges tied to cultural, societal, and organizational structures. Despite some progress, women remain underrepresented in senior leadership roles, impacting gender equality and the media landscape. Key barriers include entrenched gender norms, a male-dominated culture, insufficient mentorship, and work-life balance challenges exacerbated by the demanding nature of media jobs. These issues perpetuate the glass ceiling, limiting women’s influence in top decision-making roles. While diversity policies, flexible work arrangements, and leadership training represent positive steps, they are not enough to bridge the leadership gap. The research emphasizes the need for a comprehensive approach that includes both policy reforms and a cultural shift within organizations to foster a more inclusive and supportive environment for women.

## 5. FUTURE SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Longitudinal studies are needed to assess the long-term impact of diversity and inclusion policies on women’s representation in leadership roles. Comparative analyses across different countries or media sectors could reveal how varying cultural and organizational factors influence gender diversity. Additionally, examining how emerging technologies and digital media affect leadership dynamics could provide insights into whether these tools exacerbate or alleviate existing barriers. Evaluating the effectiveness of mentorship and leadership training programs designed for women could identify best practices and areas for improvement. Finally, investigating how gender intersects with race, class, and age within media leadership could offer a more nuanced understanding of the diverse challenges faced by women in the industry.

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