The Role of Media Law and Policy in Promoting Gender Diversity and Inclusion within Indian Newsrooms and Media Leadership

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Abstract

This chapter, titled "Bridging the Divide," really digs into a frustrating reality here in India: why are so few women making it to the top in our newsrooms and media houses? We see tons of bright women pouring out of journalism schools and starting their careers, but then, the ladder just seems to stop for many of them. Just look at a 2019 study by the Network of Women in Media, India, which found a paltry 18% of decision-making roles held by women. It's not just an internal office problem; it weakens our democracy because the media ends up showing a narrower, often biased, view of the world. We are thus closely examining all of our current laws and regulations, from the basic labor laws and our founding Constitution to the POSH Act and the IT Rules of 2021, which are particular media regulations. The question is, "Are these laws actually helping women climb the ranks, or do they mostly just deal with surface-level stuff, or overt discrimination?" The 'boys' club' mindset, unconscious prejudices that creep into hiring, the unfair load of home obligations that women typically shoulder, the persistent wage disparity, and the intimidating dread of harassment are just a few of the difficult, sometimes invisible hurdles that we're delving into in addition to the legal texts. Keeping things realistic, we're concentrating on India's distinct fusion of regional distinctions and how caste and class further complicate these issues. This chapter is about more than just identifying issues. It involves outlining doable, realistic actions. We're discussing everything from enacting legislation specifically targeting the media industry and requiring gender audits to advocating for more equitable hiring practices, strong anti-harassment measures, and workplaces that are really family-friendly. The main objective is to contribute to the creation of a media landscape in India that is really equitable, representative, and reflective of all people.

Keywords: Gender Parity, Media Law, Indian Newsrooms, Leadership Representation, Policy Interventions, Systemic Barriers

1. Introduction

The aspirational promise of equal dignity in India's Constitution often feels deep against the backdrop of everyday institutional life. It's in this shadow that one can observe this tension most clearly, particularly in this country's robust but deeply polarised media sector. Even though women account for much of the journalism and mass communication graduates today, their representation starts declining noticeably once they rise the professional ranks. The farther up the line, the smaller the number of women, revealing a persistent gender imbalance that calls into doubt the kind of progress these educational advances seem to portend.

For instance, a sobering study from 2019 by the Network of Women in Media, India (NWMI) found that women hold only 18% of decision-making positions across Indian media organisations, despite decades of increasing female representation at the entry levels. This process has been painfully sluggish (NWMI, 2019). This striking structural asymmetry raises fundamental questions about the legitimacy and authority of an institution at the centre of the world's most populous democracy. It is more than just a statistical quirk; rather, it reflects the systemic nature of the problem at hand.

India has already more than once had its moment of reckoning, with the global study "Gender Equality and Media Regulation" (September 2022), welcoming introspection. It is a mirror and it shows that despite the strong constitutional commitments for equality in Zimbabwe, they far from mirror into nuanced gender provisions in our media laws." This is not just a mistake; it is a failure by a media landscape that wants to be more representative of the richness of diversity of a nation. The report is a powerful reminder that freedom of expression and gender equality are two sides of the same coin. In a nation that cherishes a lively press, that means making sure all voices, especially those long suppressed, are heard in earnest. It suggests self-regulation as a more desirable option vis-à-vis legislative regulation, and asks us to reflect on the extent to which media institutions in India are both authorised and responsible enough to drive change. Just as important is its attention to combating gendered disinformation, highlighting the importance of gender-sensitive reporting and media literacy over repressive policy. Lastly, the report's demands for sex-disaggregated data or for the inclusion of gender provisions in policies, for balanced progress towards online self-regulation as well as human-centred response to regulation, were a gentle persuasion for India to work towards a media ecosystem which is genuinely inclusive and empowering.

At its most fundamental level, the media is much more than a business; it is the very fabric of democracy, a powerful forum where competing ideas and visions of the were and should be are engaged, where perception becomes reality, and stories come to and breathe life. Whether it's the front page of a newspaper fluttering across a bustling street in Mumbai or the local news broadcast through the sleepy lanes of Rajasthan, the news we consume, the pictures, the text and the stories can shape who we are and how we see ourselves, our communities and the world. It is, quite simply, indispensable.

But here's the rub. That the muscle of trust, an ideal trust that should be a rich tapestry of the diversity of lives and voices the institution serves, too often is woven from a single dominant thread: the male view. When most of the people in charge of making decisions, setting the agenda and telling stories are men, the stories they offer can become narrow and incomplete. Unconscious prejudices, faint as they are, grow louder. As a result, the complex, layered narratives of over half of India's residents, its women, are underreported or misrepresented.

And this isn't just about fairness or tokenism. It is about making sure the media mirror held up to society is clear and honest, unwrapped by the boundaries of a singular perspective. Only when all voices are fully represented will the media provide the dynamic, subtle reflection essential for a society to see and understand itself.

This chapter engages with that paradox of women in Indian media and the talent drain it represents – the presence of so many well-trained, talented and dedicated women in India's media who, one would have reasoned, should have risen through the ranks and to the levers of power: why do they not? It goes further than the striking lack of women in the top tier. It is in the sharp disjuncture between India's constitutional guarantees of a more equal society, its vast array of labour laws aimed at ensuring that more egalitarian reality and the lived experiences of women who make their way through newsroom hierarchies.

For others, the "glass ceiling" is as solid as ever, effective only in terms of legal framework and too rarely effective in creating a dynamic structure for transformation. We have outgrown the debate over whether diversity is a good thing — it is. The urgent question today is why, after all this time, we are still so far from making meaningful progress — and, crucially, what kinds of concrete legal and policy measures could finally start to bring down the barriers that persist. Such a challenge is the one the chapter sets out to tackle.

2. The Landscape of Gender Imbalance in Indian Media: A Factual Overview

As you know, the world of Indian media, with its vibrant mix of languages, platforms, and voices, is truly something else – a powerful force that shapes how our whole nation thinks. It's bustling, often chaotic, but incredibly influential. Yet, peek beneath that busy surface, and you'll find something concerning: a quiet, persistent imbalance between men and women that undermines everything media is supposed to stand for.

It's a common story we hear, often celebrated: "Look! So many more women are entering journalism!" And yes, that's true. But when you really dig into the numbers, and more importantly, listen to the actual experiences of women in the field, you see a stark reality. That promising flood of female talent at the beginning of their careers seems to dwindle significantly as they try to move up, especially when it comes to reaching those highly coveted leadership spots. It’s like a wide, welcoming entrance that abruptly narrows into a very exclusive corridor.

2.1 Present Situation of Representation: Exposing the Data and Variables

Women's journeys in Indian media may be compared to a broad river at its mouth that becomes much narrower as it moves upstream toward its source of impact. The pipeline problem, where female representation drastically decreases with rising seniority, is constantly highlighted by quantitative evidence.

Quantitative Data

The image presented by many organisations’ publications and research is the same. The immense scale and disjointedness of the sector make it impossible to pull together exact real-time numbers across all formats and every corner of this country, but the numbers that are trickling in are telling. One such group, the Network of Women in Media, India (NWMI), has long highlighted the glaring disparity. Their 2019 study, for instance, found that women hold just 18 per cent of decision-making posts in Indian media companies, although it did not provide a combined percentage of all female journalists (NWMI, 2019). This number has hardly changed in almost half a decade - an indication of deeper structural problems.

Sometimes it gets even worse when focusing on certain sections. Even in print newsrooms, particularly in Hindi and regional publications, men continue to dominate the staff, especially in senior editorial positions. While there are women reporters, there are fewer women in positions of power, such as editors, bureau chiefs, news editors …) With a broad range of images on from broadcast, particularly television news is full of female reporters and anchors. This facade,

however, could be deceiving. There's often a stark gender inequality visible if you take a closer peek behind the scenes at key editing control rooms, assignment desks, and production management. Newslaundry – which has reported on this anomaly switching off time and again – did it again, several times over, pointing to the lack of women on top in multiple big news organisations so far (Newslaundry, 2022).

You know, when digital media first started blossoming, there was this real buzz, wasn't there? It felt like it was finally going to be a level playing field, easier for anyone to jump in, less gatekeeping. And for a while, it seemed like many of these new digital-first news sites and content creators did start with a pretty good balance of men and women.

But here's the kicker: as these places mature and the financial pressures mount, what we're seeing is that the leadership teams often just slide right back to being mostly men. So, even in this supposedly modern, progressive space, women are still more likely to find themselves in roles like crafting content, managing social media, or covering lifestyle topics, rather than taking the reins in hard news, digging into data journalism, or leading the overall digital strategy (Newslaundry, 2022). It's a bit disheartening, seeing the same old patterns emerge in a brand new arena.

English Newspapers: Roughly one in four writers are women, contributing to news, features, and opinion pieces. Their names appear on about 20.4% of all articles. When you check the most prolific writers, there's a range: The Economic Times sees 32.7% women among its top contributors, which is good, but The Telegraph lags significantly at just 14.3%. This shows that while women are definitely writing, there's still a clear gap in who's consistently shaping the narrative at the highest levels of output in these major dailies (UN Women, 2019).

Hindi newspapers: When we turn to Hindi newspapers, the picture shifts somewhat. You'll find that only about 17.1% of those writing news, features, and opinions are women. And when you look at the bylines, their names appear on an even smaller fraction of articles – just 11.1%. Zooming into the most frequent contributors, Amar Ujala stands out a bit, with nearly 19% women in that top group. But then, it's quite stark: some major papers, like Rajasthan Patrika, have no women at all among their most prolific writers. It highlights the significant ground still to cover in Hindi media (UN Women, 2019).

Digital Media: When it comes to digital media, there's a brighter spot! Women are generally better represented here compared to traditional newspapers or TV. They make up over a third of the writers, and their work accounts for almost 40% of all articles published online.

However, it's not a uniform picture. Even in this more progressive space, you'll find some surprising dips. For instance, women's bylines can be as low as 7.4% in Newslaundry (Hindi) or 14.9% in Swarajya. So, while it's a step forward, there's still work to do even in the digital realm (UN Women, 2019).

Magazines: Looking at Indian magazines, women make up around 27.1% of writers, contributing to about 25.8% of all articles. That's a decent presence. Interestingly, some magazines show strong female representation among their most prolific writers. For instance, in places like The Caravan and Femina, the top 10% of writers are entirely female, which is fantastic! But then, a stark contrast emerges: other well-known magazines, such as Frontline and Outlook (Hindi), have no women at all in their top-contributing writer groups. It's a real mixed bag in the magazine world (UN Women, 2019).

A 2023 Indian survey revealed a harsh reality: over 60% of women journalists faced gender discrimination at work, while 80% of men didn't. This points to a significant, widespread problem (Statista, 2023). This new global study on women in news leadership paints a sobering picture: only 24% of top editors are women, even though women make up 40% of journalists worldwide. That number has barely budged from last year, which is truly disheartening. It seems getting women into those powerful leadership positions is happening at a painfully slow crawl. If things continue this way, true gender equality in news leadership might not arrive until 2074, or perhaps even later. It really highlights how deeply rooted these challenges are, despite increasing female talent in the field (Ross Arguedas et al., 2024).

Qualitative Insights

Beyond all the numbers and percentages, when you talk to women in Indian media, a much more subtle, almost insidious, picture emerges – one that explains why the numbers are the way they are. One of the biggest culprits is what we call the "gendered" beat assignment. Think about it: early in their careers, women journalists are often, almost automatically, shunted towards "softer" beats – things like education, health, lifestyle, culture, maybe "women's issues" or those heartwarming human interest stories. Meanwhile, the "hard news" beats – the gritty world of politics, crime, business, defence, international affairs – these are overwhelmingly dominated by men.

Now, this might seem like a small thing, just different areas of reporting, right? But it has massive, long-term consequences for a woman's career. Those "hard news" beats? They're the glittering prizes. They offer way more visibility, direct access to the powerful people who shape the news, and constant chances to break those big, impactful stories that get noticed. Journalists on these beats are generally on the fast track – primed for promotions, leadership roles, and a real say in what gets published or aired.

Women, stuck in "soft news" beats, even when they're doing incredibly important, deeply insightful journalism, often find themselves on a slower, less visible path. Their work, though valuable, tends to be undervalued when it comes to influencing editorial decisions or getting that next promotion. This unofficial, almost invisible, segregation means they miss out on crucial newsgathering experiences, their networks within powerful circles stay smaller, and ultimately, they're just less equipped to compete for those top editorial jobs that demand a wide range of experience in high-stakes reporting. It's a frustrating, self-fulfilling prophecy: fewer women report on "hard news," so fewer are seen as "leadership material," which just keeps men in those powerful positions. It's a tough cycle to break.

And it goes even deeper. Often, there's this unspoken assumption hanging in the air that women will, at some point, choose family over career. This leads to them being quietly overlooked for challenging assignments, promotions, or serious long-term training opportunities. This harmful prejudice, combined with a severe lack of flexible work options and proper childcare support, pushes many talented women to either step away from the industry entirely or settle for less demanding roles. And just like that, the already narrow path to leadership gets even narrower (NWMI, 2019; Roy, 2020). It's a constant uphill battle.

2.2 Why Gender Diversity Matters for Media Content and Society

Advocating for more women in leadership roles and newsrooms isn't just about being "fair"; it's also closely related to how effectively our media truly supports democracy in India. Their absence has a significant effect on the calibre and applicability of the news that we get.

Consider this: a newspaper that lacks diverse voices, particularly women, cannot provide a whole narrative. Important viewpoints are lost. For example, reportage on violence may lack critical empathy, while debates about economic policy may entirely ignore how it impacts female entrepreneurs. However, research indicates that coverage expands and becomes more inclusive and nuanced when women are present at the decision-making tables (Khan & Hasan, 2021).

They provide a variety of life experiences, questioning presumptions and promoting narratives that might otherwise go unheard, providing us with a far more complete view of our intricate society.

Beyond content, women in leadership actively reshape how women are portrayed in the media itself. They can push past tired stereotypes—the "passive victim" or "domestic goddess"—towards genuine, multi-dimensional portrayals, vital for dismantling harmful societal perceptions.

Ultimately, this is a democratic imperative. In a country where women are nearly half the population (Census of India, 2011), their underrepresentation in media leadership creates a huge democratic deficit. If the media's leaders don't reflect society, they risk losing trust and failing to bring everyone's issues to the forefront. A truly diverse media is a stronger watchdog, ensuring our public discourse genuinely represents all citizens, building a media that is not just free but truly fair and inclusive.

3. Existing Legal and Policy Frameworks: An Examination of Their Reach and Limitations

India, a nation that takes great pride in its democratic values, has extremely commendable rules that make sure everyone is treated fairly. On paper, these legislative frameworks provide women with substantial possibilities and protections, particularly in the workplace. The problem is that a somewhat complex picture becomes apparent when we examine how these regulations are really implemented in our newsrooms and among media executives. Even with the best of intentions, we frequently discover that these guidelines have some obstinate limitations in their practical application. Despite all the legislative protections that are purportedly in place, this leaves many bright female journalists navigating a very unequal playing field (Legal Associates, 2024; LexisNexis, 2024).

3.1 Constitutional Provisions and General Labour Laws

The Indian Constitution, based on **Articles 14, 15, and 16**, ensures equal protection and protection for all, including women and children. It prohibits discrimination based on religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth. However, these principles require specific regulations and assistance to be implemented in the media industry (Wikipedia Contributors, 2019) (Wikipedia Contributors, 2024) (“Article 15: Prohibition of Discrimination on Grounds of Religion, Race,

Caste, Sex or Place of Birth," n.d.) ("Article 16: Equality of Opportunity in Matters of Public Employment," n.d.).

Beyond basic rights, India has labour laws like the **Equal Remuneration Act (1976)**, aiming for equal pay for equal work. Theoretically, this should close the gender wage gap, a problem even in Indian media. However, studies (NWMI, 2019) show this gap persists, often hidden by unclear pay or biased negotiations. Enforcing this law is incredibly tough; it frequently falls to individual women. In our cutthroat, often unofficial sector where job security is uncertain, this is a frightening ask. Smaller digital businesses and local media, especially, find it difficult to properly follow these guidelines (The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976) (www.constitutionofindia.net, 2024).

Then there's the crucial **Maternity Benefit Act** (2017 amendment), providing paid leave and childcare. This should be a lifeline for demanding media jobs, helping women manage work and family without being sidelined. Yet, in newsrooms, putting it into practice often fails. While big companies might comply, many smaller regional businesses view maternity leave as a hardship, leading to quiet discrimination in promotions or hiring. Plus, required childcare facilities are often missing or inadequate, forcing tough decisions. These laws, despite their good intentions, face big hurdles: weak enforcement, subtle biases, and women's reluctance to seek help ("What Is the Maternity Benefits Act (MB Act)? | Rippling Glossary," 2024; Raman, 2021).

3.2 Media-Specific Regulations and Guidelines

Beyond our standard labour laws, India also has specific rules and self-governing groups for the media. But honestly, their main job often boils down to ensuring content is ethical, not actively pushing for diversity within their organisations or getting more women into leadership roles (Kalra, 2025).

Take the Press Council of India (PCI), established in 1978. It's like a watchdog for press freedom and standards. While their "Norms of Journalistic Conduct" guide ethical reporting, they largely stay silent on crucial internal matters like diverse newsrooms, fair hiring, or women's promotions. So, while they might intervene if women are portrayed negatively in a story, they have little real power to enforce gender balance in newsroom management. Their advice, frankly, often lacks the teeth for proper internal HR enforcement (Press Council, 2021)..

Similarly, self-regulatory bodies for TV news, like the News Broadcasters Association (NBA), now the NBDSA, set ethical standards. These rules cover responsible reporting,

accuracy, and even how to handle sensitive subjects like sexual assault – all vital for ethical content. But their focus simply doesn't extend to tracking or requiring more women in senior positions within their member channels. They're all about what airs, not about ensuring fairness behind the scenes in newsrooms themselves (Simran, 2025).

Even the newer IT Rules, 2021, which manage online content and complaints, primarily concern what's allowed online (like preventing hate speech or fake news). While they might indirectly help women journalists by offering tools against online harassment (which disproportionately targets them), these rules contain no specific directives for promoting women in leadership at digital news organisations or social media platforms in India (Anamitra Sinha, 2024).

The big lesson is clear: these media-specific frameworks, though essential for content standards, largely operate with too narrow a definition of "regulation." They completely ignore the systemic problem of gender disparity in leadership. They don't demand that media companies declare pay gaps, set leadership targets for women, or conduct regular diversity audits. This significant policy vacuum means there's no real legal or regulatory pressure for internal transformation, allowing male dominance in decision-making to persist.

3.3 The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 (POSH Act)

One of the most important legal tools for women in Indian workplaces is the POSH Act (2013). It mandates that any business with ten or more employees must set up an Internal Complaints Committee (ICC) to address sexual harassment. The Act aims to create safer workplaces by defining harassment and outlining a clear path to justice. For women journalists, who often face high-pressure, male-dominated environments, this Act is designed to be a crucial safeguard (LegalMantra, 2024).

Putting the POSH Act into practice in Indian newsrooms often faces significant hurdles, making its effectiveness uneven. Many women, especially in smaller regional media or on contract, are simply unaware that the Act or the ICC even exists. Critically, there's a deep-seated fear of retaliation. Given the often informal structures and power dynamics in news organisations, journalists worry that complaining could lead to being marginalised, losing assignments, or even their jobs (Roy, 2020). This fear is particularly acute for young or freelance women who feel they have little leverage.

Doubts exist about ICCs' independence and efficacy. Members often lack adequate training, and conflicts of interest can arise if senior management sits on the committee, potentially prioritising the organisation's reputation. The informal nature of many media workplaces also makes formal complaints intimidating.

Adding another layer of complexity is the rise of digital platforms. Women journalists disproportionately face online harassment and threats. While POSH primarily covers workplace sexual harassment, the line with online abuse can be blurry. Though the IT Rules, 2021, offer some protection, integrating these mechanisms with POSH remains a practical challenge (Majumder, 2022).

While India's legal framework offers a foundation for equality, its application to media leadership often feels fragmented and insufficient. General labour laws face enforcement hurdles, media-specific regulations overlook internal diversity, and even a vital act like POSH struggles against power dynamics. This leaves a significant gap, allowing the gender imbalance that a truly democratic media should strive to overcome to persist.

4. Systemic and Socio-Cultural Barriers to Women's Leadership in Indian Media

Beyond the legal frameworks, a complex network of ingrained institutional and socio-cultural impediments significantly influences how women in Indian newsrooms advance to top positions. An unseen but potent ceiling is frequently created by persistent prejudices, cultural norms, and unwritten regulations rather than by overt discrimination. These are the everyday realities that subtly discourage women from pursuing leadership roles and erode dreams.

4.1 Patriarchal Structures and Organisational Culture

Imagine entering a newsroom that feels like an elite club at the top, even though the entrance level is varied. This "boys' club" mindset, in which males control unwritten norms, after-hours socialising, and informal networks, is a prevalent reality in Indian media. These unofficial routes are frequently used for decisions, promotions, and important assignments, which makes it extremely difficult for women to enter and become more visible. This is supported by ingrained unconscious prejudices. Due to presumed family commitments, managers may unknowingly

view women as less dedicated or "tough" for demanding beats. A woman's job advancement may be subtly hampered by this subtle bias, which can appear in hiring decisions, promotions, and even day-to-day encounters. This is particularly seen in "gendered" assignments, as women are often directed onto "soft news" beats like culture, education, or leisure. Their visibility and perceived leadership potential are effectively limited since, despite their value, these beats seldom result in the high-profile, "hard news" political or criminal stories that indicate a clear path to senior editorial posts (NWMI, 2019).

4.2 Work-Life Balance and Domestic Responsibilities

For a lot of Indian women, pursuing a tough job in the media carries a huge "double burden." Unfair domestic and caregiving duties, ranging from child care to elder care, are firmly placed on their shoulders by societal expectations. This goes beyond simply running a home; it involves overcoming tremendous pressure that affects a woman's capacity to handle the erratic schedules, late nights, and frequent travel that are frequently necessary for demanding leadership positions in the media. This is made worse by the fact that many Indian media outlets still do not have family-friendly practices. Extended parental leave, despite being required by law, can subtly stigmatise people who use it, flexible working hours are uncommon, and strong childcare assistance is frequently nonexistent or insufficient. In the absence of true institutional support, women are often compelled to choose between advancing their careers and carrying out deeply rooted family responsibilities.

4.3 Wage Gap and Economic Disincentives

Despite the many obstacles it has to scale, gender in the Indian media also needs to climb over one more barrier: financial disincentives. There is a lack of specific, recent empirical evidence on the gender pay gap in the Indian media, but data that does exist, based on surveys and qualitative studies of the working lives of journalists, is consistently downward in estimates of the extent of the pay gap (NWMI, 2019). This indicates that women are still often underpaid relative to their male counterparts for work of equivalent value, a discrepancy which can have far-reaching consequences for their financial security and career satisfaction in the long run. In addition to pay disparities, there may be specific gendered barriers to salary and promotion negotiation for women. Cultural expectations often discourage assertiveness in such contexts, leaving women

less comfortable or less effective in negotiating compared to their male colleagues. Worse still, when women do negotiate assertively, their efforts are sometimes met with heightened resistance or suspicion. Over time, these seemingly small economic disadvantages can compound significantly, discouraging many from pursuing senior leadership roles or making them appear less financially viable and attractive.

4.4 Lack of Mentorship and Sponsorship: Missing Connections

In the media, getting promoted frequently depends more on who you know than what you know. Here, women sometimes lack access to important sponsorship and mentoring possibilities. Homosocial reproduction is the term for the tendency of senior leaders, who are primarily men, to mentor those who are similar to themselves. This implies that women are less likely to get beneficial unofficial advice, networking opportunities, and proactive promotion advocacy (sometimes known as "sponsorship"). Without these crucial relationships, women are left to handle the challenges of job growth mostly alone as they are deprived of important insights, tactical counsel, and the potent advocacy that may accelerate a career.

4.5 Threat of Harassment and Online Abuse: A Chilling Effect

Women in Indian media are disproportionately subjected to many types of workplace harassment, intimidation, and undermining conduct, in addition to the sexual harassment covered by the POSH Act. It may be draining and discouraging to experience this ongoing low-level animosity. This is made worse by the awful reality of trolling and abuse on the internet. Often in reaction to their work or even simply their online presence, female journalists are singled out for harsh, sexist assaults, threats, and character assassinations. Their mental health suffers greatly as a result of this particular exposure to the digital assault, which also deters them from pursuing high-profile positions and may even cause them to leave the field altogether, therefore cutting off future leaders.

5. Towards a More Equitable Media Landscape

To truly improve gender equality in the media, we need stronger enforcement of current rules, sector-specific anti-discrimination legislation, and mandated gender audits. These actions would address the particular difficulties women encounter in the media sector, fostering openness too.

5.1 Strengthening and Expanding Existing Legal Frameworks

Mandatory gender audits are crucial. Through regular, transparent reporting on representation and pay equity, media organisations must face disparities and set targets (Padovani & Ross, 2018). Measuring all levels then identifies areas for improvement, fostering a true culture of accountability (Du, 2024). We need sector-specific anti-discrimination laws that directly tackle the media's unique challenges. These tailored provisions should address discriminatory practices, like biased beat assignments that hinder women's career advancement (Evans, 2023). Crucially, new laws must also explicitly prohibit indirect discrimination, which existing frameworks often miss, truly ensuring comprehensive fairness (Evans, 2023). Strengthening enforcement is key. Establishing robust, independent oversight bodies for laws like the POSH Act would boost compliance and accountability (Du, 2024). Harsher penalties for non-compliance would also deter gender discrimination (Mellinger, 2013). While crucial, some argue legal changes alone may not achieve true media gender equality without addressing broader societal norms and biases.

5.2 Policy Reforms within Media Organisations

The discussion around implementing diversity quotas or aspirational targets for leadership in Indian media is crucial for gender inclusivity; quotas can boost representation (Shikha, n.d.), while targets encourage organic integration (Vartika, 2021). This must be paired with inclusive hiring, like blind resume reviews and diverse interview panels to mitigate bias (Tripathy, 2018), supported by objective performance metrics for fair promotions (Chakravarty & Bhatnagar, 2017). Organisations must adopt robust and comprehensive anti-harassment policies that address all forms of bullying and discrimination, coupled with accessible reporting mechanisms and prompt, impartial redressal processes to foster genuinely safe workplaces (Tripathy, 2018; Pande & Ford, 2014). Equally important are family-friendly measures—such as gender-neutral parental leave, flexible working arrangements, and subsidised childcare—which can help to ease the “double burden” many women carry as they balance professional and domestic responsibilities (Tripathy, 2018; Chakravarty & Bhatnagar, 2017). In addition, implementing pay transparency laws is a critical step towards closing the gender pay gap and ensuring fair and equitable remuneration (Vartika, 2021). While these measures are essential for encouraging diversity and inclusion, it is increasingly recognised that quotas alone cannot resolve the deeper cultural biases embedded within organisations. Lasting change requires a holistic approach that integrates sound

policy frameworks with concerted efforts to transform workplace cultures—a shift that is vital for achieving meaningful and sustainable progress.

5.3 Role of Industry Associations and Self-Regulation

Collective action within the industry is vital for advancing gender equality and fostering diversity in the media sector. Professional associations have a unique opportunity to lead the way by formulating clear and comprehensive codes of conduct, embedding robust accountability mechanisms, and actively working to dismantle entrenched gender biases (Kulkarni et al., 2024; Du, 2024). Alongside this, the establishment of mentorship schemes—linking emerging female journalists with senior leaders—can play a transformative role. Research has shown that such mentorship significantly enhances career progression for women, providing not only guidance but also the confidence and networks essential for advancement (Farsia, 2024; Grimson & Grimson, 2019). Equally important is the systematic collection and transparent reporting of gender representation data across the media landscape. This practice is crucial for tracking progress, informing policy decisions, and fostering accountability at both organisational and industry levels (Bhattacharya et al., 2024; Du, 2024). However, while these initiatives are indispensable, there is a growing recognition that they must be complemented by efforts to challenge and reshape deeper societal norms and cultural biases. Without such a holistic approach, there is a risk that progress will remain superficial and uneven, rather than truly transformative.

5.4 Education and Awareness Initiatives

A thorough strategy to gender sensitization is necessary to bring about long-lasting change in workplace dynamics and media portrayal. To equip leaders to advocate for gender equality, media professionals—particularly those in leadership and human resources roles—need to receive obligatory, continuous training that challenges prejudices and encourages inclusive behaviors (Kannaiyan & Neelamegam, 2023). Public media literacy initiatives are essential because they enable viewers to demand varied representations and critically evaluate media material, hold companies responsible for their content selections, and impact media practices (Savaroliyaei, 2024). Although these tactics are essential for advancing gender equality, it's crucial to understand that cultural prejudices and institutional obstacles may still exist and might undermine initiatives, necessitating a comprehensive strategy (Farsia, 2024).

6. Case Studies and Best Practices (Indian and Global Lessons)

Indian media leadership's gender diversity is slowly shifting, led by smaller, newer digital platforms prioritizing inclusivity. They're increasingly implementing transparent hiring and robust anti-harassment policies, like the POSH Act, to create safer environments for women (Sareen & Dhingra, 2024). Despite persistent male dominance in top roles, these efforts show a commitment to fostering diversity and tackling historical barriers hindering women's media advancement (Nair, 2023).

6.1 Indian Success Stories

The landscape of gender diversity in Indian media leadership is undergoing a gradual transformation, with smaller and newer digital platforms often leading the charge. These organisations are not only bringing more women into mid-management roles but are also consciously fostering inclusive newsrooms from the outset, actively rejecting the traditional "boys' club" cultures of legacy media. Many are implementing transparent recruitment practices and strengthening anti-harassment frameworks, such as compliance with the POSH Act, to create safer and more supportive working environments for women (Sareen & Dhingra, 2024). These developments mark a hopeful shift in parts of the industry. Yet, despite such promising progress, top leadership positions across the broader media landscape remain overwhelmingly male-dominated. In more traditional settings, entrenched gender biases continue to hinder women journalists, who frequently face unequal pay, restricted promotional opportunities, and underrepresentation in decision-making spaces. This persistent imbalance limits their ability to influence media agendas and narratives (Tritsch, 2023; Abdualimova, 2023). It underscores that while internal reforms within some organisations are driving positive change, dismantling systemic barriers across the industry remains an urgent and ongoing challenge.

6.2 International Best Practices

Globally, initiatives such as the BBC's adoption of diversity targets and transparent reporting mechanisms have shown promising results in advancing gender equality within leadership structures. In contexts where reporting requirements and quotas are robustly enforced—as seen on US Fortune 500 boards and in countries with stringent compliance measures—there has been a marked increase in women's representation at senior levels (Sojo et al., 2016). Likewise, the Nordic model, with its emphasis on family-friendly policies such as shared parental leave and subsidised childcare, has been pivotal in enabling women to balance professional and personal responsibilities, thereby supporting their career progression (Solveig, 2024). These interventions, alongside anti-discrimination laws and broader support frameworks, have contributed to

accelerating female representation in leadership roles across various regions. Yet, despite such gains, women remain significantly underrepresented in corporate leadership worldwide, highlighting the uneven nature of progress (Han & Noland, 2020). For India, adopting these principles—transparency, strong enforcement, family support, and explicit targets—offers valuable lessons. However, their successful implementation demands careful adaptation to the country's distinctive cultural and socio-economic context, particularly in addressing deeply rooted gender norms and societal stigmas that continue to impede women's advancement.

7. Conclusion

The stubborn gender imbalance we see in Indian newsrooms and leadership isn't a simple problem; it's deeply complex, tangled up in both outdated laws and ingrained cultural beliefs. Tackling this isn't just about what's fair for women; it's fundamentally about the very quality and democratic integrity of our media. To truly foster gender diversity and inclusion, we need a concerted, multi-pronged effort: demanding robust legal reforms with real teeth in enforcement; championing proactive, genuinely inclusive policies within media organizations; fostering industry-wide collaboration to set new, higher standards; and, crucially, sparking a fundamental shift in how we all think. Only by pulling these levers together can we truly build a more equitable, representative, and ultimately, a much stronger and democratic Indian media landscape that genuinely reflects and serves all its citizens.

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